

A POWER BOYS

Adventure

The Mystery of the VANISHING LADY

by
Mel
Lyle



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The
Power
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The
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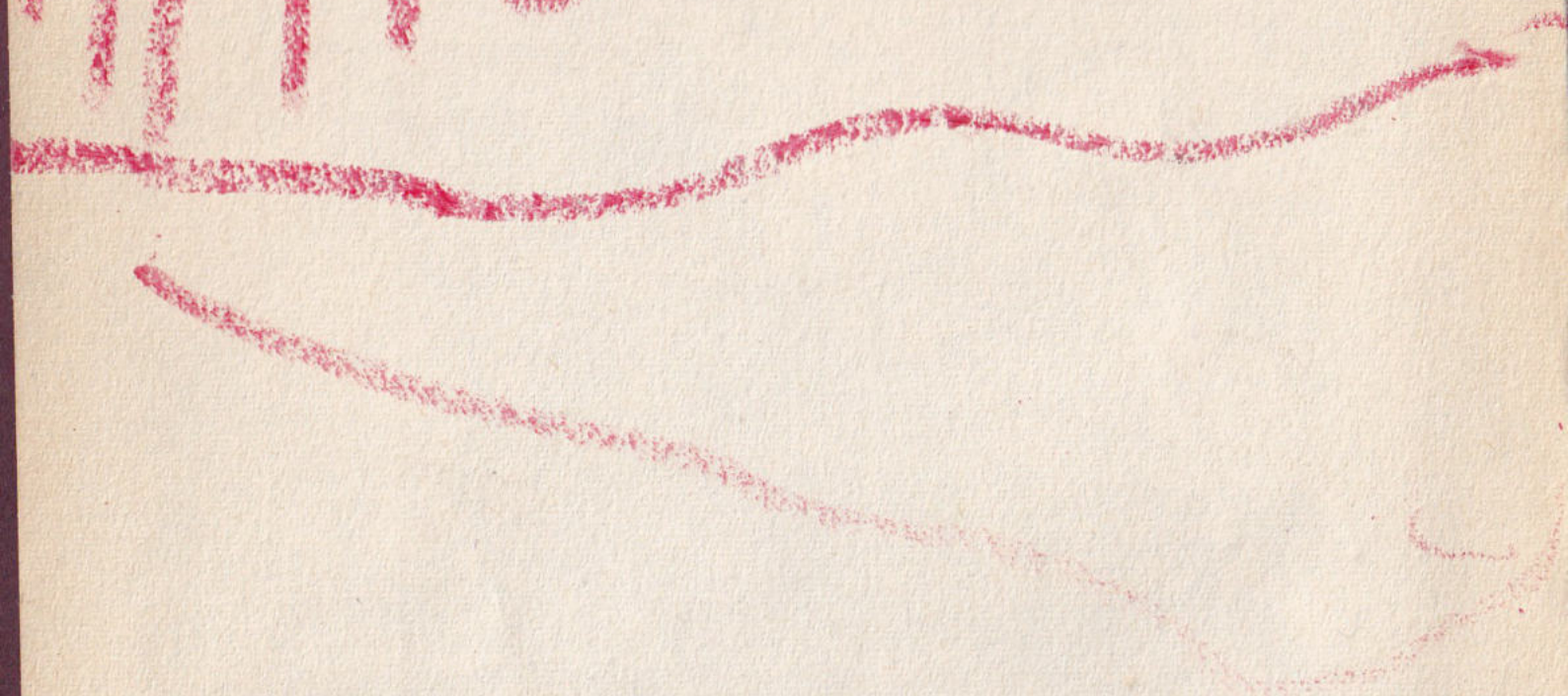
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A POWER BOYS ADVENTURE

The Mystery of
**THE VANISHING
LADY**

By Mel Lyle

Illustrated by
Raymond Burns

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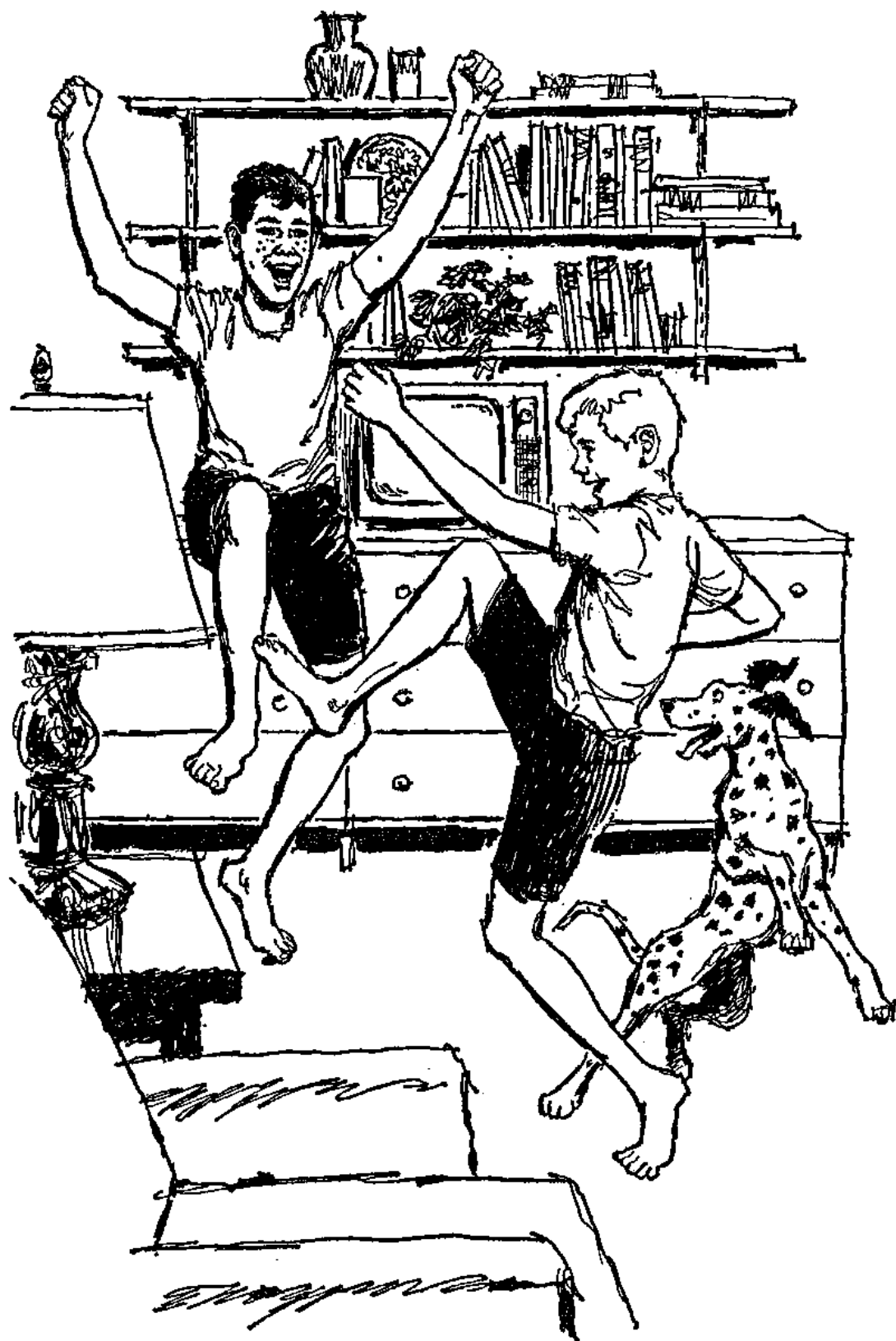
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The Mystery of
THE VANISHING LADY



1

New Quarters

The boys loved their new home. It was wonderful to be living permanently in the biggest city in the United States.

"New York," Jack Power said, "just like a dream come true."

"You bet," said his younger brother Chip. "And for making the dream come true, we can thank Mr. Donovan."

"I thank you, Mr. Donovan," Jack cried gaily.

"And I thank you, too," echoed Chip to the invisible Mr. Donovan and whirled about the living room in a happy dance.

Their Dalmatian, Blaze, barked and leaped about with them.

"What's going on out there?" called Mr. Thomas

Power from the darkroom where he was working.

"Nothing," Chip called back. "We're just talking."

"Well, tone it down, tone it down."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Donovan was Mr. Barry Donovan, the millionaire head of the Donovan Advertising Agency, with offices in the Empire State Building. Mr. Donovan lived in New York, with his family, on East Thirty-second Street. He had persuaded Mr. Thomas Power, a free-lance photojournalist, to move to New York where the Donovan Advertising Agency could provide a great deal of work for him. But before taking this step, Mr. Power, a widower, had talked it over with his sons—Jack, seventeen, and Chip, fifteen.

"How about it, boys?" Mr. Power had asked.

"I'd love it," Jack said.

"Chip?"

"Me, too. But what about you, Dad?"

"Unanimous," Mr. Power declared.

So here they were, at long last, in their wonderful new home on the sixteenth floor of a fine old building at Seventy-fifth Street and Central Park West.

It had been fun furnishing the eight-room apartment overlooking the park—a bedroom for each of them, a living room, a dining room, a kitchen, an enormous room that served as Mr. Power's photo studio, and a smaller room that was the darkroom.

Mr. Donovan's wife Sylvia had helped with the decorating, and their son Dick Donovan, the same age as Jack, had assisted with the moving. Mr. Barry Donovan had supervised all.

Now on this warm Sunday afternoon late in August, Mr. Power came out of the darkroom and stood, smiling, observing his family. Here was Jack, standing quietly looking out the window, tall, slender, red-haired, freckled, serious green eyes glistening in the sunlight. There was Chip, sprawled on a sofa, blond and blue-eyed, slim, almost as tall as Jack, his face, as always, mischievously puckered, one dangling hand patting the head of the spotted dog that was lying comfortably on the carpet beside the sofa. But both his sons were barefoot and were wearing nothing more than Bermuda shorts and T-shirts.

"Gentlemen," Mr. Power inquired, "is this the way

you intend to greet your company?"

"You look very handsome, Dad," Chip countered. Mr. Power was tall, dark, barrel-chested, his black hair tinged iron-gray.

"Flattery will get you nowhere, young man. Get dressed."

"How about you, sir?"

That brought a laugh all around. Mr. Power suddenly realized that he too was barefoot and wearing nothing more than Bermudas and T-shirt.

"I suggest we all get dressed."

Jack looked at his wristwatch. "Plenty of time. It's only three-fifteen."

"In our particular condition of dress, or undress," Mr. Power laughed, "thank goodness for *that*. Okay, let's all get a move on and get properly attired."

Chip unfurled from the couch. "Dad?"

"Yes, Chip."

"Miss Nancy Brockton's due here at four o'clock. Correct?"

"Correct. And now it's only three-fifteen. I repeat—in our present state of attire—thank goodness for that.

So what do you say we get a move on, kids.”

“No, I mean,” Chip said, “why doesn’t the old lady come herself? This is the place to take the pictures, don’t you think?”

“I do think,” Mr. Power replied. “But in our business the client is always right. The old lady is the client and she’s paying for the service, and paying well.”

The old lady was Mrs. Anita Brockton, Nancy Brockton’s aunt. Mr. Power had been recommended to her by Mr. Barry Donovan. She wished to sit for portrait photos but had declined to come to Mr. Power’s studio. She had requested instead that Mr. Power come to her home for that purpose and was sending her niece to pick him up.

“You fellows are going to assist,” Mr. Power said, “and I couldn’t ask for better assistants. Our client, according to Mr. Donovan, is somewhat of an eccentric, but that’s none of our business, is it? Our business is to take her picture when and where she wishes. We’re going to have to lug equipment, but that’s part of our job. The niece will be here at four o’clock to pick us up, and I suggest, very firmly now, that we be in

total readiness when she comes. Any comments to the contrary, gentlemen?"

"None," said Jack.

"Dad, you're the greatest," said Chip with a grin.

"We start right now," ordered Mr. Power.

And from that moment there was feverish activity in the Power household.

2

Down to Work

Nancy Brockton, accompanied by a tall, dark young man, arrived promptly at four o'clock. She was blond and willowy, about twenty-one. She had fine white teeth and bright blue eyes.

"I'm Nancy," she announced, "Mrs. Brockton's niece, and we've come to fetch you."

"Thomas Power," said Mr. Power, introducing himself. "You and I have talked on the telephone, Miss Brockton."

"Yes, that we have, Mr. Power."

"My son, Jack. My son, Chip."

"Oh, they're very handsome, aren't they?" she said, smiling warmly.

"Thank you."

"This is Paul—Paul Davenport—my fiancé. Well,

not *quite* my fiancé. We're *almost* engaged. I've known him all my life." \

"How do you do?" said Mr. Power.

The tall young man nodded gravely. He seemed shy, reserved. He spoke quietly. "I've come along to help. I expect there's lots of equipment to carry."

"Oh, my boys are strong enough," said Mr. Power with paternal pride.

"But we can always use a helping hand," murmured Chip.

"All right then, let's get at it," said Mr. Power, smiling.

At the curb downstairs, they piled cameras and lighting equipment into a shiny red convertible. It was Paul Davenport's car and he drove; Chip sat alongside him up front.

"Actually," Paul remarked to Chip, "Mrs. Brockton's house isn't far. If it wasn't for the equipment, we could easily walk. Seventy-seventh Street and Riverside Drive. We'll be there in short order."

Chip peered through the windshield. "Not much traffic."

"It's Sunday. And a very beautiful day. A lot of people are out of the city."

"True enough," agreed Chip and then changed the subject. "On an assignment like this, we're Dad's assistants, Jack and I. I mean like real assistants, not just carrying the equipment. Do you know anything about taking pictures, Mr. Davenport?"

"Mr. Davenport," snorted Paul amiably. "Please call me Paul."

"Do you, Paul?"

"Well, not professionally. Professionally, I'm a lawyer."

"Gee, you're young for a lawyer."

"Twenty-four," said Paul, "and I haven't been a lawyer long. Just graduated this past June."

"Got your own office?"

"Not yet. For the time being, I'm in my father's office. He's a lawyer, too. Samuel Davenport."

"When are you going to get your own office?" persisted Chip.

"In time, I hope. Takes money to set yourself up in private practice."

“Don’t you have money?”

Paul laughed. “Not enough.” He laughed again. “But I am engaged—well, practically engaged—to an heiress.”

“Oh, yes, that he is,” called Nancy from the back-seat.

They stopped at an ancient house on a quiet, tree-shaded street. It was a two-story white stone house on the corner of Seventy-seventh Street and Riverside Drive. It had a long flight of stairs going up, and a basement exit beneath the stairs.

“We’ll use the front entrance,” said Nancy.

Nancy led and the men followed, carrying the equipment. Nancy used a key to open the door and they found themselves in a large vestibule with one window. To the left, there was a stairway going up to the second floor.

Nancy pointed. “Up there are the bedrooms and guest rooms.”

To the right, there was a corridor, and again Nancy pointed.



"There," she said, "is the living room and the other rooms."

"Do you live here, too, Miss Brockton?" inquired Mr. Power.

"Oh, yes. My parents are dead. I'm Auntie's ward. There's just the two of us. Uncle Brockton died some time ago."

"What do we do with the stuff?" asked Jack, indicating the photographic equipment.

"Just leave it here in the vestibule," said Nancy. "Auntie's got company," she added blithely. "It was our job to get you here safely. Now I'll introduce you, and then off we go. Paul and I are going to a party. This way, please."

The living room was large and lofty, with a high ceiling and old-fashioned furniture. It was occupied by three people, one of whom came forward, smiling graciously. She was a tiny lady, about sixty years old, with white hair and lively blue eyes.

"This is my aunt, Auntie, Mrs. Anita Brockton," said Nancy. "And this is Mr. Thomas Power, Auntie dear, and his sons. The redhead is Jack Power, and the

blonde is Chip Power. They assist their dad in the picture-taking."

"I'm delighted to know you," said Auntie Brockton in a high, spirited voice. "Please meet my friends, Miss Della Medford and Dr. Simon Torrance."

Della Medford, about thirty-five, was dark and attractive. Dr. Simon Torrance, about forty, was tall, slender, silver-haired, pink-faced, and handsome. They acknowledged the introductions, and then Nancy bubbled, "We're off and running, Paul and I. Good-bye, everybody."

"Have a good time, children," Mrs. Brockton called after them. Then she said to Mr. Power, "We're having coffee and most delicious pastry. I do hope you'll join us."

"Thank you," said Mr. Power.

"And the boys?" inquired Mrs. Brockton. "Cokes?"

"Thank you," chimed Jack and Chip together.

They were served by an elderly maid upon whom Auntie Brockton beamed with pleasure. "This is Maud. Dear Maud," she said. "I love her and she's been with me for twenty years, but won't live in. Goes

home every day at six o'clock and leaves us alone in this big, old house."

"It's not so big," said Chip, a stickler for truth.

"But you'll admit it *is* old," replied Auntie Brockton, and everybody laughed.

The boys sat about with their Cokes, listening to the grown-ups.

Mrs. Brockton was sure a great one for chatter.

"I've only known Miss Medford and Dr. Torrance for six months now, but they've become dear friends. Dr. Torrance is not only a medical doctor but a psychiatrist."

"Oh?" said Mr. Power politely and sipped his coffee.

"And Miss Medford," exclaimed Auntie Brockton, "you'll never in your life guess what she does—I mean, her profession. Try, Mr. Power."

"She's a model," guessed Mr. Power.

"Wrong," retorted Mrs. Brockton cheerfully.

"I'm an astrologer," said Della Medford. She had a deep, throaty voice.

"Very interesting," said Mr. Power.

"Do you believe in astrology?" asked Mrs. Brockton.

"Well, no, not really," replied Mr. Power. "How about you, Dr. Torrance?"

"I find it intriguing, but I can't quite say I'm a believer."

"Well, I am," spoke up Chip.

Della Medford applauded. "At least I have *one* ally. Good for you, young man. Do you happen to know the signs of the zodiac?"

"Sure do," said Chip, and to his father's amazement he rattled them off. "Capricorn, Sagittarius, Scorpio, Libra, Virgo, Leo, Cancer, Gemini, Taurus, Aries, Pisces, and Aquarius. I look up my horoscope every day in the newspapers. Sometimes it works."

Once again Della Medford applauded. "It would work much better if you came to my studio for a real reading. And bring your dad. Perhaps I can convince him. My studio's on Broadway and Eighty-sixth Street, Mr. Power. Why don't you come sometime? Just to show you I'm not trying to drum up business, it'll be free of charge. Perhaps I can make a believer out of an unbeliever."

"Dad, why don't we give it a try?" suggested Chip.

Mr. Power smiled. "I'd say I'm more sold on psychiatry than on astrology. Where do you have your office, Dr. Torrance?"

"Seventy-second, near Madison."

"You're in the phone book?"

"Not yet, I'm afraid. I'm rather new in New York."

Jack stirred. "When do we take the pictures?"

"The boy's got a point there, Anita," said Dr. Torrance in his cool, precise diction.

"Takes a psychiatrist to point the way," giggled Auntie Brockton. "Do forgive me, Mr. Power. I hope we haven't been boring you."

"Not at all," answered Mr. Power. But he set down his cup, anxious to get about the work he had come for.

"We'll do it in the den," said Auntie Brockton. "Excuse me, folks. It won't take too long, will it, Mr. Power?"

"Depends upon how good a subject you are," replied Mr. Power.

"Well, I've never sat for a portrait before," confessed Mrs. Brockton. "But I promise to cooperate."

"Excellent," said Mr. Power. He made a sign to the boys and, led by Mrs. Brockton, they took the equipment to the den. There, under Mr. Power's instructions, they set up the lights and posed Mrs. Brockton. She was an excellent and cooperative subject.

"Very good, very good," Mr. Power murmured time and again. "I know the lights are hot and I know I'm demanding a great deal from you, but you're being very patient, Mrs. Brockton, and I thank you."

"I thank *you*, Mr. Power. You're the one who is being very patient."

And when finally it was all over, Mrs. Brockton patted her face with a handkerchief and said, "I want these portraits as a gift for Nancy—for her birthday. She'll be twenty-one this Thursday. I *do* hope we'll have final portraits for Thursday."

"Thursday, definitely," Mr. Power assured her. "We have some excellent pictures here."

"Will I be able to see proofs in advance? So that I can select those I like?"

"I'll bring your proofs tomorrow, Mrs. Brockton."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Power. I do hope I

didn't waste too much of your time babbling away upstairs."

"Not at all."

"I'll have Dr. Torrance drive you and your boys home."

"Thank you, ma'am."

3

A Forgotten Errand

Monday morning they all got up late, even Blaze, but first thing after breakfast Mr. Power attended to the Brockton portraits.

When he came out of the darkroom he was smiling happily.

"It's something you boys will learn as you grow up," said Mr. Power somewhat cryptically.

"What will we learn?" Jack inquired dutifully, but cast a sideways glance at Chip. Grown-ups were queer people and he could feel a lecture coming on. The boys braced themselves, but the lecture, this time, was short.

"When the work turns out well, it gives great satisfaction," pronounced Mr. Power. The boys waited for more, but that was it.

"The work turned out well?" murmured Chip.

"Excellent," said Mr. Power. "The proofs are wonderful, all of them." Then he laughed. "She's going to have a heck of a problem deciding which ones she wants."

"Maybe she'll want them all," said Jack, always practical. "And that way you'll earn more money."

"Another thing you'll learn as you grow up," said Mr. Power. "Nobody wants all—ever. People take pride in being selective."

"People and pride," Chip said with a laugh as he rolled on the floor in a mock fight with Blaze. "That's the name of our lecture for today, Jack."

"Your younger son is being cynical," Jack told his father.

Mr. Power looked at his watch. "I've got a full day ahead of me. Got to fly out to Chicago, and I won't be back until late tonight. Jack?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Be sure you deliver those proofs to her. Today."

"Yes, sir. Any special time?"

"No special time. She doesn't want the finished product till Thursday."

"Depend on me."

"I'm depending on you, Jack."

"Don't you depend on me?" inquired Chip, prone on the floor after having vanquished Blaze.

"I depend on both of you," said Mr. Power.

At noontime Dick Donovan came to call.

"Hi, good old fellow sufferers," Dick said.

"We're sufferers?" Chip inquired.

"We're fatherless," Dick intoned.

"We are?" Chip said.

"Well, aren't we? Your dad and mine are by now together in faraway Chicago, and neither of them will be home until late tonight. So we're fatherless, but not forlorn. You guys are having dinner at my house. Mother's preparing a beautiful stand-up roast, but that's not till six o'clock. Until then, guess what?"

"What?" asked Jack.

"Baseball in the park. The Dick Donovans against the Norman Kirshners. How does your arm feel, Jack?"

"Fit and fine."

"You're pitching; I'm catching. You're at third, Chip."

"I happen to be a second baseman," Chip grumbled. "Don't you trust me at the pivot, Mr. Manager?"

"I do when necessary, but Willie's off today from his job as counselor at that kids' camp. You want to argue whether it's you or Willie at second?"

"I'm on third," said Chip.

They came back to the apartment, sunburned and weary, but triumphant, 6 to 5, in ten innings. They took another shower after the showers in the locker room at the park and then went to Thirty-second Street. They ate ravenously of the delicious roast-beef dinner and then watched TV. It was dark, almost nine o'clock, when Jack and Chip came home. Poor Blaze was starved, and they fed him a big meal.

Then Jack clapped his forehead and exclaimed, "Holy smoke!"

"What now?" asked Chip.

"The proofs!"

"What proofs?" asked Chip.

"Auntie Brockton's proofs. The portrait photos!"

"Yeah. Dad said to take them today without fail."

Chip looked at his watch. "Nine o'clock. Too late, do you think?"

"I'll call and find out."

"You do that."

Jack checked the phone book and called Mrs. Anita Brockton.

She answered after three rings, "Mrs. Brockton here."

"Hi. Jack Power," Jack said. "About your proofs, Mrs. Brockton."

"Is something wrong?"

"Oh, no, ma'am. They're lovely. My dad asked us to bring them over today, and—well, my brother and I, we got somewhat delayed."

"That's perfectly all right, young man."

"I mean—is it all right if we bring them over now?"

"Certainly. And you needn't rush yourself. We're having a bit of a party right now, and we'll all be up quite late."

"Well, thank you, ma'am."

“Not at all, young man. Take your time. See you later.”

Jack hung up and whistled in relief.

“It’s okay,” he announced. “Plenty of time. It’s a nice warm evening. We’ll walk and take Blaze. Look at him; he’s just begging for some exercise.”

“Want to go for a walk, Blaze?” Chip inquired.

Blaze replied by running for his leash and bringing it to them.

4 *An Experiment in Palm Reading*

Auntie Brockton loved parties. She loved to dress up in all her finery and loved to see Nancy all dressed up. She loved this party in particular because all her friends were present. There was only one stranger, Mr. Adam Quincy, whom Paul had brought along. Mr. Quincy was a big strong man with a round red face. The others were Della Medford, Dr. Simon Torrance, Nancy, Paul, and Paul's father, Mr. Samuel Davenport, who was Auntie's lawyer and an old and dear friend.

Auntie and Nancy did the serving because Maud, of course, had gone home at six o'clock. They had eaten an excellent buffet supper and then Nancy had played the piano for them in the living room. Nancy played beautifully. After Nancy's recital,

Auntie sat down at the piano and played accompaniment for Mr. Samuel Davenport, who sang old-fashioned songs. Mr. Davenport—about sixty, tall, and gray-haired—had a fine baritone voice.

Now, more coffee having been served, they were all cheerfully chatting, and the subject of astrology came up.

“A good astrologer,” Auntie informed the company, “has to be a highly sensitive person. A good astrologer usually has other sensitive qualities. Take Della, for instance. Aside from her astrology, she’s a marvelous palm reader.”

Mr. Samuel Davenport looked dubious.

“Just what,” he inquired, “is a palm reader?”

“A palm reader,” replied Dr. Simon Torrance, “is a person who can tell you things about yourself by merely studying your palm.”

“Doctor,” asked Lawyer Davenport, “do you believe in that kind of rubbish?”

“Rubbish?” scoffed tiny Auntie Brockton. “Just because you have a closed mind on the subject, Samuel, doesn’t mean it is rubbish.”

Lawyer Davenport smiled affectionately.

"I'm just asking," he said. "*Do* you believe in palm reading, Dr. Torrance?"

"Don't pick on Dr. Torrance," said Nancy, defending the tall, handsome man. Quite obviously Nancy had a great respect for Dr. Torrance.

"I'm not picking on anyone, dear," said Samuel Davenport. "I'm merely inquiring."

"Well," replied Dr. Torrance, "as a psychiatrist, a doctor, and a man of science, I can't quite say I *do* believe. On the other hand, I must state that I've observed Della do some miraculous things along that line."

"Dad," said Paul to his father. "As lawyer to lawyer—the proof is here."

"Beg pardon, Son?"

"Miss Medford. She's right here with us. Perhaps she'll consent to give us a demonstration."

"Would you, Miss Medford?" inquired Samuel Davenport.

"I don't know whether I'll be successful," Della Medford said modestly, "but I'll be happy to try."

"In that case," retorted Mr. Davenport, "it depends on whom you try *with*. Actually, you know most of us here and know about us."

"But she doesn't know Mr. Quincy," cried Auntie Brockton. "None of us do—except perhaps Paul."

"True," conceded Mr. Davenport. "All right then, Mr. Quincy. May we prevail upon you to subject yourself to Miss Medford's alleged powers?"

"Be delighted to be the subject," said Adam Quincy. His red face grew redder as everybody looked at him.

"All right, Miss Medford?" asked Samuel Davenport.

"I'll do my best to convince you," said Della.

As they all gathered round, Della Medford took Adam Quincy's palm and studied it.

"I see a long lifeline," she intoned slowly. "I see there has been some sickness, but that is over. You will live for a long time. I see that certain people dear to you have passed away. I see, also, that you have had trouble in the past. And I see that you are now striving to be more successful than you have been."

"Oh, nonsense! Pure nonsense!" exclaimed Mr.



Davenport. "Those are general statements, nothing more. They can apply to anybody. You say he's had sickness? Everybody's had sickness. You say he'll live for a long time? That's for the future and we can't prove it now. Trouble in the past? Everybody's had trouble. Dear people have passed away? Sure, people die. Striving to be more successful? Everybody strives to be more successful. I'm afraid you'll have to do better than that, Miss Medford, to convince *me*."

Della Medford, still holding Adam Quincy's hand, looked up into his eyes.

"Do I have your permission to be more specific?" she asked softly.

The red-faced man was perspiring. He coughed.

"Whatever you wish," he whispered uncomfortably.

"Well, then"—Della was back to inspecting the palm—"you have had trouble with the law—"

"No," interrupted Samuel Davenport. "I'm afraid that's too personal. We can't inquire into a man's personal life just to prove something about palm reading. I'd appreciate your going to another topic, Miss Medford. I mean, as a lawyer, I can state that

any man has a right not to incriminate himself."

Adam Quincy, smiling wanly, his hand still imprisoned by Della Medford, nodded toward Samuel Davenport.

"Another topic, then," said Della, gazing intently upon the palm. "You are not married—a bachelor." Her brows were knit in concentration. "Your business is—a form of merchandising. You buy and sell things. You deal—you deal in precious objects." She released Adam Quincy's hand, sighed, and looked up at him.

There was a long silence in the room.

"Well?" inquired Samuel Davenport.

"Marvelous," replied Adam Quincy.

Lawyer Davenport's face showed stubborn lines.

"No," he breathed incredulously.

"Yes," answered Adam Quincy, perspiring freely, mopping his face with a large handkerchief. "Perhaps it is chance, perhaps Miss Medford is good at guessing, or perhaps the palm does disclose certain things to certain people. But I *am* a bachelor. And I *am* in the merchandising business. And I *do* deal in precious objects."

And again there was a deep silence in the room, this time broken by Auntie Brockton's happy soprano voice.

"What *is* your business, Mr. Quincy? Or is it a secret?"

"No secret. I'm a jeweler."

"A jeweler!" she cried. "How interesting!" And she trotted to him. "Do you carry a loop, Mr. Quincy?"

"What's a loop?" queried Nancy.

"A loop, my dear," said Auntie Brockton, "is the thing a jeweler puts in the socket of his eye. You know, the kind of magnifying glass they use to examine diamonds and such. That's called a loop, isn't it, Mr. Quincy?"

"It is," he agreed.

"And most professional jewelers always carry a collapsible kind of loop with them. Don't they, Mr. Quincy?"

"They do," he said, "and I have one right here with me."

Smiling, he produced his jeweler's loop.

Said Auntie, "As a jeweler, you must know a great deal about diamonds."

"I'm an expert on diamonds," said Adam Quincy.

"Perhaps I can get a service from you," laughed Auntie, "free of charge."

"I'd be happy to oblige."

"Show him your ring, Nancy."

Embarrassed, Nancy hung back.

"Show Mr. Quincy," said Auntie Brockton.

From a distance, Nancy extended her right hand. A huge, solitaire diamond ring sparkled beneath the overhead lights.

"It was a gift from my deceased husband," trilled Auntie, "to Nancy on her eighteenth birthday. Kind of an heirloom in our family. It's supposed to be very valuable. Why, even in the old days it was insured for fifty thousand dollars. I have no idea what it's worth now. Would you know, Mr. Quincy?"

"I could give you a fair appraisal," said Adam Quincy.

"Let's have an appraisal, Nancy," laughed Auntie Brockton. "Let's see what it's worth these days." And the tiny lady turned her merry eyes on Adam Quincy. "Free of charge, Mr. Quincy?"

"Free of charge, Mrs. Brockton."

Nancy was ashen now, leaning on the piano, not going forward.

"Nancy!" called Auntie Brockton, her voice somewhat impatient.

Just then the doorbell rang.

For a moment nobody moved.

And again the bell rang.

"Of course," said Auntie brightly. "The boy with the proofs—my photos. How the sudden ringing of a bell can scare you!"

"I'll get it," said Nancy and hurried quickly out of the living room. She rushed along the corridor to the vestibule and opened the door for Jack Power, who was holding the brown manila envelope containing the proofs of Mrs. Brockton's portrait photos.

"Hi, Nancy."

"Hi, Jack."

"Brought the proofs for your aunt."

"Please come in."

Jack lingered in the doorway.

"My brother," he said.

"Well, have him come in, too."

Jack grinned. "He's got our dog, Blaze. I think he'd better stay outside."

"Well, just don't stand there, Jack."

"Okay," said Jack.

He entered and Nancy closed the door behind him. She took the envelope from him and laid it on a side table in the vestibule. As she handled the envelope, Jack noticed her ring.

"Gee, a big one," he said.

"What?" she inquired, startled.

"Your ring. Wow! That sure is a big stone."

"Never mind my ring. What about your brother?"

"Like I said, he's outside with the dog."

"Dog?" she asked distractedly. "What kind of dog?"

"A Dalmatian. A beauty."

"Oh, I love Dalmatians," Nancy said. "May I see him?"

"They're right outside—there." Jack pointed out the window.

"Where?" Nancy opened the window.

Jack hung out into the summer night, calling down

to Chip, who was at the curb with Blaze.

“Chip,” Jack called, “bring Blaze over. Nancy wants to see him.”

“Okay,” Chip said to the dog. “Get a move on, boy.”

And as Jack began to pull in from the window, just at that moment, the house was plunged into darkness.

5

Accused!

Jack was in inky blackness.

He could hear Blaze barking outside, but he had no time to listen because he was suddenly engaged in a struggle and did not know what the struggle was all about. Hands were on him, arms were around him, and he fought to get them off. There was screaming in his ears—female screaming. Was it Nancy? Who else? But *why* was she screaming and with *whom* was he struggling? Was he struggling with Nancy? But why? *Why?*

Suddenly the lights blazed on and he felt his arms pinned to his sides. There were many people in the vestibule.

He was being held by Paul Davenport.

Auntie Brockton had her fingers within the little

door of an electric fuse box. It was situated alongside the vestibule window.

"Somebody cut off the main switch," Auntie Brockton said hoarsely. "That's the one I just reconnected," she added.

"But who and why?" demanded Samuel Davenport.

Now Nancy Brockton silently extended her right hand. The diamond ring was gone! And now the index finger of that hand pointed at Jack Power.

"He did it!" accused Nancy, pale and disheveled.

"That's a lie!" shouted Jack, squirming in Paul Davenport's grasp.

"Let him loose, Paul," ordered Mr. Davenport.

Paul released Jack.

Jack was almost in tears, bewildered, as he adjusted his clothes.

"What's going on here?" He blinked at the many people.

"What's going on," said Nancy, still gasping for breath, "is that you stole my ring. That's what's going on."

"No! Why would I? Why should I?" Jack de-

manded, looking from one to the other of the people surrounding him.

"He admired my ring," Nancy said. "Then he made some kind of pretense of having me look out the window where his brother is with their dog. He cut off the main switch, and in the darkness he stole the ring."

"Maybe somebody did just what she's saying," Jack implored. "Maybe she really thinks that I did it. But I swear she's mistaken!"

Many pairs of accusing eyes glared at him, unbelieving. For the first time in his life, Jack experienced the frightful sensation of being a person wrongly accused of a crime. He looked pleadingly to Paul Davenport.

"Search me. Please search me, Paul."

Paul Davenport glanced toward his father.

Gravely, Samuel Davenport nodded.

Jack held his hands in the air, and Paul Davenport performed a thorough search. Then he gestured for Jack to put his hands down.

"No ring," Paul announced. "This boy has no ring on his person."

Relieved, Jack sighed, "I told you."

But Nancy remained firm.

"Then he tossed it out to his brother downstairs," she declared shrilly.

"We can very easily find out about that," stated Dr. Torrance.

Moving swiftly and gracefully, Dr. Torrance went out the front door, then reappeared accompanied by Chip and Blaze.

The dog, sensing an unfriendly attitude, growled.

"Quiet, Blaze," Chip ordered and looked about. "What's up?" he inquired.

"You're going to have to submit yourself to a search, young man," said Mr. Davenport in a somewhat agitated voice.

"I'll submit to nothing of the kind!" retorted Chip with spirit. "What's going on here, Jack?"

With admirable patience, Jack calmly explained the situation.

"Well, in that case," Chip said with a shrug, "all right." He released Blaze, who went to Jack. Murmuring softly, Jack patted the dog until Blaze, reassured, ceased growling. "Okay." Chip frowned. "Search!"

It was obvious to all that the boy, angry and insulted, was controlling his temper. "So? Who searches?" he demanded.

"Paul," prompted Samuel Davenport.

Hesitatingly, Paul approached Chip. "All right?" Paul asked.

"Be my guest," said Chip.

Paul searched and announced, "Sorry. No ring."

"Well, he had time to hide it somewhere outside," said Nancy.

"I did nothing of the kind," replied Chip stoutly.

"Now, look here," shouted Nancy angrily, pointing again at Jack. "That boy stole my ring, and that's all there is to it. If it's not on his person, then he tossed it out to his brother, who hid it somewhere outside. He stole it!" She began to cry hysterically. "Jack Power! He fought with me in the darkness and pulled the ring from my finger. Nobody's going to talk me out of that. *That boy stole my ring!*"

"I did *not!*" Jack shouted back at her.

Now it was Mr. Davenport who spoke up, talking quite kindly.

“Young man, if this is some sort of prank, then this is the time to admit it. If you took the ring, then return it and we’ll forget all about it. Unless you do so at once—if you insist on denying Miss Brockton’s clear accusation—then it becomes a matter for the police. It’s up to you, young man.”

“I can’t return anything because I did not take anything.”

“Do you admit you were involved in a struggle with her?”

“I admit to a struggle. Whether it was with her or not, I don’t know. It was dark.”

“It was with me,” Nancy insisted.

“Will you return the ring, young man?” demanded Samuel Davenport.

“I can’t return what I didn’t take,” said Jack.

Samuel Davenport shrugged. “Paul.”

“Yes, Dad?”

“Call the police.”

6 *A Surprise for Thomas Power*

At eleven-fifteen that Monday night, Thomas Power, bone weary from his trip to Chicago, returned home.

Just as he opened the door to the apartment, he was greeted by the jangling ring of the telephone. He hurried to the phone, lifted the receiver, and was shocked to hear Jack's voice on the other end.

"Jack!" Mr. Power exclaimed. "What in the world!"

"Hi, Dad. I've been calling."

"Where are you this late?" Mr. Power demanded grumpily. "Why aren't you here at home?"

"Easy, Dad," Jack said soothingly.

"And Chip? Where's Chip?"

"He's here with me, Dad. And Blaze, too."

"And just where is that, please? Where *are* you this time of night?"

"Hold on to your hat, Dad."

"Jack, I'm in no mood for jokes. I'm tired. I just arrived from the airport. Now where *are* you?"

"In jail," Jack said softly.

"You are *where*?" shouted Mr. Power.

"Well, not exactly in jail," Jack explained. "We're in Night Court."

"Night Court! What in heaven's name are you doing in Night Court?"

"Well, sir, we were—sort of—kind of—arrested."

"*Kind* of arrested?" spluttered Mr. Power.

"Well, arrested," Jack declared mournfully.

Mr. Power was now thoroughly concerned and his voice revealed it.

"Jack, what is it? What's happened?"

"Well, sir, we were accused—Chip and I—of stealing a diamond ring."

"Diamond ring? Whose diamond ring?"

"Nancy Brockton's. You see, we went to the Brockton home to deliver Mrs. Brockton's proofs—"

"I'll be right down there," interrupted Mr. Power.
"You just stay right where you are."

"I've been calling every fifteen minutes, Dad. Glad I finally got you."

"You just stay right where you are," ordered Mr. Power.

"There's nothing else I can do but that," Jack intoned sadly.

"All right, stay with it, Son," encouraged Mr. Power. "I'll be down there shortly. And, Jack—"

"Yes, Dad?"

"You haven't done anything wrong, have you? You or Chip?"

"Of course not, Dad."

"Good boy. See you soon. 'Bye now."

Mr. Power hung up and then immediately dialed Police Headquarters. He asked for Detective James Wilson and waited for the connection to be made.

Detective James Wilson was Thomas Power's oldest and dearest friend, and when Wilson's voice came on, Mr. Power said, "Sorry to bother you this time of night, James."

Detective Wilson instantly recognized his friend's voice.

"How are you, Thomas? No bother at all. What can I do for you?"

"It's the boys—Jack and Chip."

"How are they?"

"They've been arrested. They're at Night Court."

"Night Court!" exclaimed Detective Wilson. "What's up, Thomas?"

"I don't rightly know. I just flew back from Chicago, just got here at my new apartment, when Jack called from Night Court. I didn't give him an opportunity to tell me the full story. I told him I'd be right down there and then called you."

"Good," murmured Detective Wilson. "You did exactly right, Thomas. You know where Night Court is?"

"I'll find out."

"It's at one hundred Center Street," Detective Wilson informed him, "and that's but a stone's throw from Police Headquarters. I'll hop right over there and look into it. I'll be there long before you, Thomas."

I'll take care of the kids. Don't worry."

"Jack says they're not guilty of anything."

"Of course they're not. Night Court's for criminals, and your lads wouldn't commit a criminal act for any reason in the world. I know them, don't I? I've known those boys all their lives."

Quite humbly, Mr. Power said, "Thank you, James."

"Some kind of misunderstanding," Detective Wilson assured him. "Misunderstandings do happen. Okay, I'm on my way to Night Court. See you there, Thomas."

7

Night Court

Detective James Wilson was tall and broad-shouldered, with a square jaw and a rugged chin. When he entered Night Court, the first person he recognized was the lawyer, Samuel Davenport, who was sitting with an elderly little lady and a blond young woman. Detective Wilson nodded to Mr. Davenport and Mr. Davenport gravely nodded in return.

Now Detective Wilson gazed about the crowded courtroom and discovered the boys seated on a bench alongside a uniformed policeman. He walked across quickly and confronted them. The policeman arose, smiled, snapped off a salute.

"How are you, Detective Wilson?" the policeman said respectfully.

"Fine, thank you, Danny. Yourself?"

"Excellent, sir."

"I'm here on behalf of these youngsters," explained Detective Wilson as the boys beamed up at him. "All right if I take them off with me to a conference room?"

"Perfectly all right, sir. Just remember to bring them back," the policeman responded with a chuckle.

"Don't you worry about that," replied Detective Wilson, then beckoned to Jack and Chip. "Just follow along with me, lads."

He took them to a quiet room and gestured for them to sit down, which they did. He sat facing them. "Don't look so surprised," he said. "I just didn't happen to fall in here by mistake. Your dad called me, and he will be here soon. Now, what's this all about?"

Chip grinned. "Blaze is also arrested. He's in custody with a bailiff."

Detective Wilson cocked his head. "We'll take care of Blaze in due time. First things first—and you lads are first. Now, what's this all about?"

Slowly and seriously Jack recited all of the events that had occurred from the moment he had rung the bell to deliver Mrs. Brockton's proofs. Chip chimed in

with Sunday's events—the taking of Mrs. Brockton's portrait photos. Then Detective Wilson closely questioned the boys and they responded promptly and clearly.

“Good, good. Very good,” said Detective Wilson. “I believe I've had the entire situation explained to me. Has anything been omitted? Have I failed to inquire about anything?”

“Nothing, sir,” replied Jack. “Now you know all that we know. A crazy mess, isn't it?”

Smiling, Detective Wilson stood up. “Were you scared?”

“Well, a little bit, yes,” said Jack. “You get caught up in a crazy thing like this, and you just don't know how it'll come out.”

“Not me,” Chip offered. “If you don't have a guilty conscience, you have nothing to be scared about. I only worried about Dad coming home and not finding us. But they've been very kind to us here. They let us make all the calls we wanted—even wanted to buy us sandwiches if we were hungry.”

“But we weren't hungry,” added Jack. “And when

Chip isn't hungry, then by gosh he *is* worried."

"But not about us." Chip grinned. "Only about Dad coming home to an empty apartment. Not even Blaze to greet him."

"All right, let's get back in there," suggested Detective Wilson. "With an impatient magistrate up there on the bench, these things can be sticky sometimes. But we're lucky. The magistrate sitting in court tonight is Judge Harlan Dewey, whom I've known and respected for many years. He's a fair and equitable man. So don't you kids worry about a thing."

Quietly they went back into the courtroom where Detective Wilson returned the boys to the policeman who was in charge of them. Then he motioned to Mr. Samuel Davenport, who arose and accompanied Detective Wilson to the conference room.

"You've got a pretty rotten case against these boys," said Detective Wilson sternly.

Shaking his head slowly, Lawyer Davenport smiled. "It's not *my* case against them, James. I've got nothing against these youngsters, and I do admit it's a poor case. But Miss Brockton insisted that the older boy,

Jack, stole her ring, and there was nothing else I could do but call the police."

"True, there was nothing else you could do," admitted Detective Wilson. He took out a pad of paper and a pen. "Now, then, there was some kind of party going on in the Brockton house, wasn't there?"

"Yes, there was."

"Would you give me the names and addresses of the persons who attended this party?"

"Certainly, James." Samuel Davenport half-closed his eyes, thinking. "Well, of course there was Mrs. Anita Brockton and her niece, Nancy Brockton. They live there in the Brockton house. The address—"

"I know that address," said Detective Wilson, looking up from his notes. "The boys have already acquainted me with it."

"As a matter of fact, they're right out there in the courtroom."

"Who is?" queried Detective Wilson.

"Mrs. Brockton and Nancy Brockton," replied Lawyer Davenport.

"What about the rest of the persons who were there

at the party?" inquired Detective Wilson.

"No sense dragging them down here, too," responded Samuel Davenport. "They were not witnesses; they could add nothing to these proceedings. In point of fact, the only actual witness, the prosecuting witness, is Nancy Brockton. Mrs. Brockton came downtown with us because, well, she's sort of sympathetic to the boys. She happens to like them very much. She believes if they did do this, it's some kind of boyish prank, and she wants to plead their cause with the judge. She doesn't want them to go to jail."

"They won't," snapped Detective Wilson.

"What makes you so sure of that, James?"

"Because," retorted Detective Wilson, "I happen to have known these boys since they were infants. They're a couple of fine, upstanding young men. Not delinquents, nothing like that. They're not crooks. They didn't steal anybody's ring. They didn't steal anything. They couldn't. It's simply not in them."

Lawyer Davenport shrugged. "Since I don't know either of them, James, I can neither agree nor

disagree with your opinion.”

Detective Wilson poised his pen on the pad. “All right. Let’s get back to the people at the party.”

“Well, there was myself and my son Paul. You know our addresses. There was a lady named Della Medford, and a psychiatrist named Dr. Simon Torrance.” Lawyer Davenport recited their addresses and waited until Wilson had written them down. “And there was another man,” continued Mr. Davenport. He frowned, thinking. “His name was—er—yes—Quincy. Mr. Quincy.”

“First name?”

“I heard it, but I can’t recollect it.”

“Any idea of his address?”

“No. First time I met him was at the party. Paul brought him. He’s an acquaintance of Paul’s.”

“Good enough,” said Detective Wilson, pocketing pen and pad. “I’ll catch up with that tomorrow. I’ll drop in at your office, if you don’t mind. There’s a great deal I’d like to know about all of these people.”

“Are you personally going to investigate this matter?” asked Samuel Davenport.

"I'm here," replied Detective Wilson. "And once I've begun, I may as well see it through."

"Couldn't ask for a better man." Samuel Davenport smiled. "I think you're one of the finest detectives on the entire police force."

"Well, thank you right kindly, Sam."

There was a sharp knock on the door.

"Come in," called Detective Wilson.

Danny, the uniformed policeman, entered.

"Gentleman outside wishes to see you, Detective Wilson."

"And who would that be, Danny?"

"A Mr. Thomas Power."

"Please show him right in."

Danny delivered Mr. Power and withdrew.

Mr. Power's face bore deep lines. He looked tired and distressed.

Detective Wilson introduced the men. "This is Samuel Davenport, a fine lawyer in this city. Mr. Davenport, meet Thomas Power, the father of the two lads being held."

"How do you do?"

They shook hands, then Lawyer Davenport said, "I suppose you gentlemen would like to be alone." He bowed and went out, closing the door behind him.

"I've talked with the boys," Mr. Power said wearily. "They've told me a bit of what's been going on."

"I can tell you the rest," said Detective Wilson, and he summed up all that he had been told by Jack and Chip.

Fretfully, Mr. Power asked, "And what happens now?"

"Now, when their turn comes, they'll have their hearing." Detective Wilson patted his friend's arm. "You mustn't worry, Thomas. That's an excellent judge out there."

"But I *am* worried," asserted Mr. Power. "The policemen, this court, all this official business—frankly, I'm frightened out of my wits."

"Please," said Detective Wilson softly, "let me explain to you what Night Court is. Actually, it's a preliminary hearing. If the magistrate, Judge Harlan Dewey, finds there is sufficient evidence against the boys, then he will order them jailed and held for the

Grand Jury. Then your worries would begin. But if Judge Dewey decides there is not sufficient evidence, then the case is dismissed right here and now, and it's all over. Just between you and me, Thomas, I wouldn't want a better judge in charge of this preliminary hearing than Judge Dewey. I've known him personally for almost twenty years, and he's a fine, wise, fair man. Now I beg of you, try not to worry."

"But—"

The door opened abruptly. It was Danny.

"Your case has just been called," he said breathlessly. "The hearing is about to begin."

"Thank you." Detective Wilson drew a deep sigh and faced up to Mr. Power. Reassuringly he tapped his knuckles against Mr. Power's chin, and then they bustled out of the conference room and into the courtroom.

Now, for the first time that night, Chip began to feel a slight twinge of fear. As he and Jack stood in front of the judge, he had to stiffen his legs to keep his knees from trembling.

Up to this point he had been a spectator in the crowded courtroom, listening to other people's cases. Now he and Jack were inside the barrier, flanked by policemen, and it was *their* case that was to be heard. Nancy Brockton was inside the barrier along with a district attorney, Detective Wilson, and Mr. Power. As he glanced at his father's pale face, Chip swallowed and wet his lips.

The judge had white hair, a long thin face, and a deep, powerful voice.

"This preliminary hearing can be waived," the judge

announced. "In that case, I can set bail immediately and let the Grand Jury take over the proceedings. Do you wish to waive this hearing?"

"No, sir," said Mr. Power.

"Are you the father of these boys?"

"Yes, your Honor," replied Mr. Power.

"Is there an attorney representing them?"

"No, sir."

"You have a right to an attorney," Judge Dewey advised.

"I know that, sir," said Mr. Power. "I don't think an attorney will be necessary."

The judge peered down at him. "Your privilege," he said. "All right, then. Be seated, all." He looked down to his papers. "I call Miss Nancy Brockton."

Nancy Brockton took the witness stand and told her story.

Then Jack was called and told his story.

And then Chip, who told his story.

As Chip left the witness stand, Detective Wilson rose to his feet.

"If it please the Court," Detective Wilson said, "I

should like to serve as a character witness for these young defendants. As your Honor knows, I am a member of the New York City Police Department."

"Take the stand, Detective Wilson, and be sworn," ordered the judge.

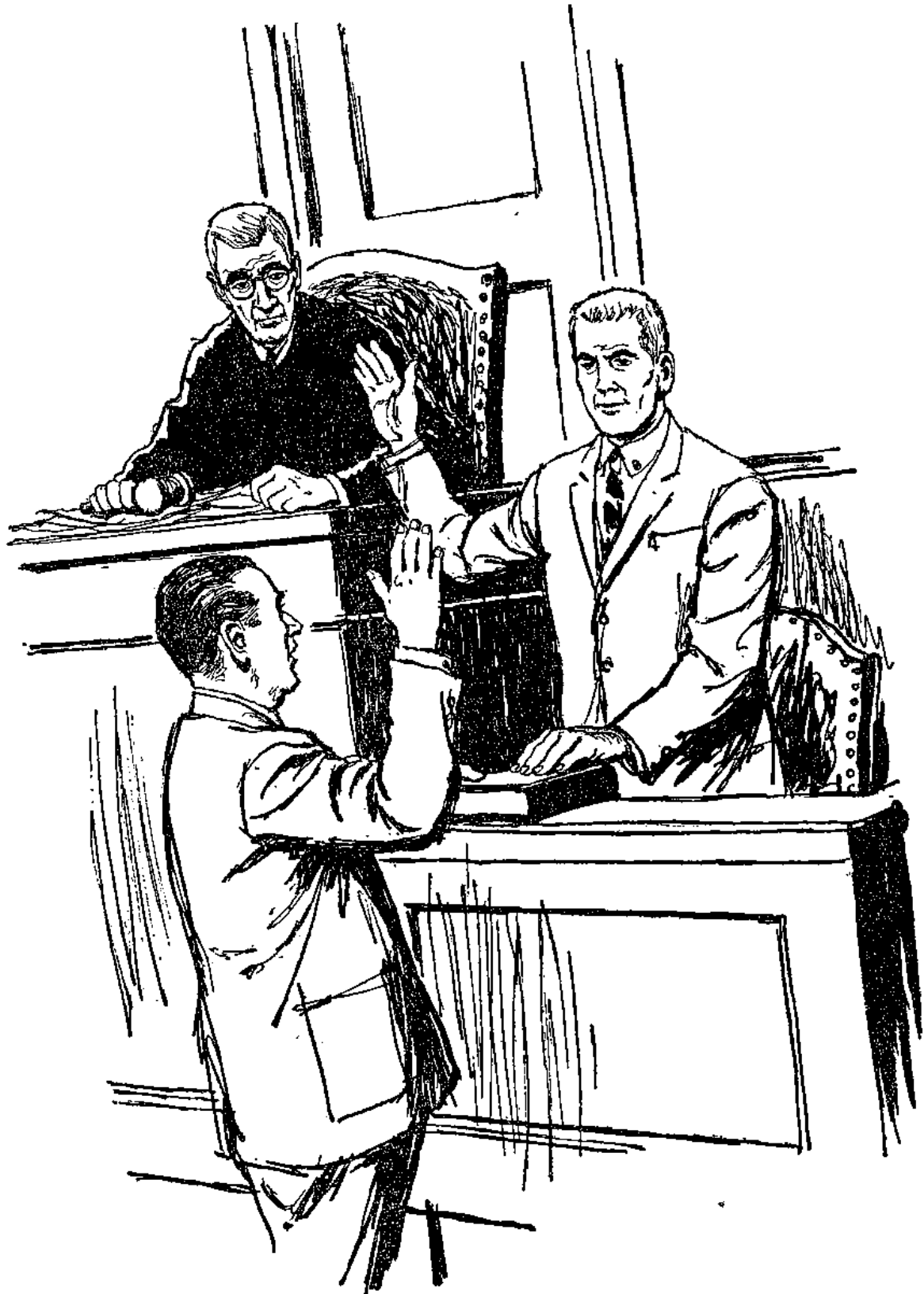
Detective Wilson obeyed and then spoke for the record.

"I have known Chip Power and Jack Power all of their lives. I know them to be young gentlemen of excellent character. I can state, from my own personal knowledge, that they are honest and trustworthy, have never committed a criminal act, have never been in trouble with the law. I repeat, I have known them all their lives and they have my fullest recommendation as to truthfulness, character, and integrity."

"Thank you, Detective Wilson," said the judge and motioned him off the stand. There was silence in the courtroom as the judge consulted his papers. Then he looked up.

"I recall Miss Nancy Brockton to the stand."

Nancy came back to the witness stand and sat quietly.



The judge gazed down upon her. "Miss Brockton, do you regularly wear that ring that was allegedly stolen?"

"No, sir. Only on special occasions."

"And tonight was such a special occasion?"

"Yes, sir. We were having a party."

"I see." Judge Dewey sighed. "Now then, you say that Jack Power took notice of your ring in the vestibule?"

"Yes, sir. He remarked about it."

"And he also remarked that his brother was outside with their dog, the Dalmatian?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you raised the window in the vestibule, asking to see the dog. Correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"And then Jack Power leaned out the window, calling to his brother. True?"

"Yes, sir."

"And then the lights went out?"

"Yes, then the lights went out."

The judge sighed. "If the boy was leaning out the

window, Miss Brockton, how could he have opened the fuse box, then found and cut off the main switch?"

Nancy was silent for a moment.

Then she said, "I glanced away. I wasn't watching him every second. Maybe he leaned in and opened the door of the fuse box."

"You say 'maybe.' "

"Yes, that's what I said, sir."

"But, Miss Brockton, how would he know where this fuse box was located? He had only been in the house once before. Is that true?"

"Yes. Once."

"And that time he had been there to assist his father in taking pictures of your aunt?"

"Yes, sir."

"He was *not* there to locate fuse boxes, was he?"

"But maybe he did."

"Again—'maybe,' " sighed the judge. "Miss Brockton, on that day when you brought them to take the pictures, were you wearing your ring?"

"No, sir."

"Then why—for what purpose, I ask you—would

the boy be wandering around a strange house to locate a fuse box?"

Nancy squirmed uncomfortably. "I—I don't know."

The judge returned to an examination of his papers, then looked down once again to Nancy on the witness stand.

"Jack Power was searched immediately after the lights came on?"

"Yes, sir."

"To what result, Miss Brockton?"

"The ring was not found on him. But maybe he tossed it out to his brother."

"But his brother was brought in and also searched, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"And no ring was found on his person?"

"Maybe he hid it somewhere outside."

"Maybe, maybe, maybe," growled the judge.

"‘Maybe’ is not evidence. Is it, Miss Brockton?"

She did not answer.

"Is there anything further you wish to add, Miss Brockton?"

"No, sir."

"You may leave the stand."

There was a ripple of excitement in the courtroom as once again the judge studied his papers.

Then the judge leaned back and spoke slowly for the record.

"The accused are brothers, two boys of good family, never in trouble before and of excellent character, as was verified by a distinguished member of the Police Department. The evidence against them is flimsy, improbable, and uncorroborated. There is, in fact, no actual evidence against them." The judge sat upright. "In a democracy, in a free country, there exists a presumption of innocence unless there is proof of guilt. In the case at the bar, there has been no proof of guilt."

Judge Dewey rapped his gavel.

"Case dismissed!" he pronounced. He leaned forward, smiling. "Mr. Jack Power, Mr. Chip Power—you are acquitted, gentlemen. You are free to go."

There was applause from the spectators in the courtroom.

Outside, where they were all gathered in a corridor,

Mrs. Anita Brockton beamed up at tall Mr. Thomas Power.

"Oh, I'm so glad it turned out the way it did, Mr. Power. I really think some boyish prank is being played on all of us, under our noses. You'll see, it'll all come out in the wash. Boys *will* be boys and we adults can never really know what goes on inside their adventurous minds. But criminals—of course not! They're such sweet, *dear* young men."

Detective Wilson chuckled.

"And it's high time," he remarked, "that the sweet, dear young men were home in bed. See you tomorrow, lads. We've a lot to talk about."

Mr. Power clasped Detective Wilson's hand.

"Thank you for everything, James," he said gratefully.

"Good night, Thomas. And good night to you, lads. Have a good night's sleep. You've earned it."

One son on either side of him, and his arms engaged in theirs, Mr. Power proudly marched his family out—when suddenly Chip broke away.

"Blaze!" he exclaimed and rushed back and re-

trieved Blaze from police custody.

Barking happily and leaping about in delight, innocent Blaze had no idea he had been arrested, no idea he had been in jail, no idea he had been a criminal in a detention pen.

And, of course, nobody ever dared tell him.

9

Two Theories

They slept the sleep of the just.

After getting to bed so late, not one of them stirred before eleven o'clock Tuesday morning, and then it was Mr. Power who stirred first. Blaze, of course, was awake, but had remained dutifully quiet while sniffing about the sleeping family. Now he whined to Mr. Power for breakfast, and Mr. Power, after obliging Blaze, took him out for a walk in the warm and lovely morning.

When they returned, the boys were up and about.

"I'm starved," declared Chip.

"Like that's something new," scoffed Jack.

"I'm starved myself," said Mr. Power.

"Like *that's* something new," joshed Jack.

"Aren't you hungry?" inquired Mr. Power.

"Starved," admitted Jack, and the kitchen rang with their laughter.

Jack squeezed juice while Chip set the table. Mr. Power attended to the bacon and eggs, and Chip did his job of heaping golden butter on the hot, toasted English muffins. They had a long, leisurely, savory breakfast while chatting about the events of the night before.

"Well, at least I can rest easy. My boys aren't crooks," Mr. Power said jokingly.

"Were you worried, Dad?" inquired Jack.

"Sure I was worried."

"You didn't think we did it, did you?"

"Of course not. But when you're accused—when you get mixed up with the law—crazy things can happen."

"Only my kid brother wasn't scared," said Jack.

"I was," admitted Chip. "When we finally got up there in front of the judge, I was quaking."

"It takes courage to admit when you're scared," approved Mr. Power.

"That judge was a great guy," declared Jack. "He

sure asked the right questions, didn't he?"

"Brilliant," said Mr. Power. "A brilliant man, that judge. And thank heavens for that."

"I wonder what did happen to that ring?" teased Chip.

"You." Mr. Power pointed an admonishing finger at his younger son. "You keep your nose clean. Stay out. Don't interfere."

"Me?" Chip rounded his eyes.

"I know *you*," grumbled Mr. Power, smiling.

"I'm not going to monkey in any of *that*."

"That's very wise of you," said Mr. Power, nodding. "Detective Wilson is perfectly capable of taking care of this affair *without* the assistance of amateur detective Chip Power, and don't forget to remember that, mister."

"I'm not forgetting to remember," said Chip, grinning.

Mr. Power finished the last of his coffee and looked at his watch.

"I've got to get down to Mr. Donovan's office. There's a full day ahead of me. I may have to fly out

to Denver tomorrow, but I'm not sure yet. If I do, at least I'll go with an easy heart. You boys are out of that mess, cleared and acquitted, and thank the Lord for that." He stood up. "Stay out of trouble, gentlemen."

"Would *we* ever get into any trouble?" teased Chip.

"Oh, never," Mr. Power responded laughingly.

At one o'clock the bell rang and Jack opened the door for Detective James Wilson, clear-eyed and crisp this Tuesday afternoon.

"Hi, lads," greeted Detective Wilson.

"Hi," said the boys together.

"And where would your dad be?"

"Out working to support us," drawled Chip.

"Always with the jokes, this young one, eh, Jack?"

"Always," said Jack with an affectionate grimace.

"I've been working, too," said Detective Wilson.

"On the ring business?" inquired Jack.

"On what else?" replied Wilson.

"Tell us," begged Chip. "Please tell us."

"Sit down, gentlemen.

"This morning," said Detective Wilson, "I interviewed two of the people who were present at the party last evening. Miss Della Medford and Dr. Simon Torrance. Quite charming people, indeed. Not quite the type who would stoop to snatching a valuable ring, would you say?"

"I would *not* say," agreed Jack.

"Me, I would say 'No comment,'" offered Chip.

"We have a cynic among us, haven't we?" inquired Wilson.

"You know old Chip," grieved Jack. "He's the character in the family."

"Also," declared Detective Wilson, "I talked with the young lady, Nancy Brockton. She insists that you, Jack, pulled that ring off her finger. Judge or no judge, acquittal or no acquittal—she insists that you did it."

"Well, she's either terribly mistaken," Jack said seriously, "or she's lying in her teeth."

"I'm a cop," said Detective Wilson, "and cops must check out the bleakest side of things. The bleak side is, she's lying in her teeth. My question then—why?"

"I wish I had an answer," Jack said ruefully.

"But somebody did take that ring," protested Chip. "She says we did, and we say she's lying. Maybe Jack doesn't have an answer, but I have."

"We're listening, boy," encouraged Detective Wilson.

"Well," hazarded Chip, "knowing we didn't do it, she tries to pin it on us. There's only one answer. She knows who took it and is trying to cover up for that person."

Detective Wilson offered up a broad smile.

"Excellent thinking, indeed. It's a theory and we're sure going to give it a whirl. Of course, there is the other side."

"What other side?" queried Chip.

"That she's making an honest mistake and really believes that Jack, there in the dark, took it." Detective Wilson stood up. "Well, I'm off."

Chip's face clouded in disappointment.

"Without us?" he asked.

Detective Wilson looked undecided. "I'm going to chat with the lawyer, Mr. Davenport."

Now Jack interceded. "I think you ought to take us

along, sir. Acquitted or not acquitted, we're still interested in this thing. And we could possibly be of help. Didn't Chip just now come up with a fine theory?"

"Yes, he did," replied Detective Wilson. He thought for a moment, then said, "All right, no reason why you lads shouldn't accompany me."

"Thank you," cried Chip.

"Okay, let's go," said Detective Wilson.

10

The Vanishing Lady

Lawyer Davenport had his office on the twelfth floor of a tall building on East Fifty-seventh Street. It was a large room, bright with many windows, and its walls were lined with legal books.

The boys made themselves comfortable on a fine leather couch while Detective Wilson seated himself in an armchair alongside the lawyer's desk.

"Any news?" asked Mr. Davenport, lighting a cigar.

"I'm continuing with my routine investigation," replied Detective Wilson. "Today I talked with Miss Della Medford and Dr. Simon Torrance. Separately, of course. Talked with Miss Medford at her astrology studio, talked with Torrance at his office. They had nothing to say that could help me in locating the missing ring."

"Well, after all, what could they say?"

"How well do you know them, Sam?" inquired Detective Wilson.

Samuel Davenport shrugged.

"Not too well. Actually, they're friends of Auntie Brockton."

"How well does *she* know them?" countered Detective Wilson.

Lawyer Davenport laughed.

"That's a rather complicated story."

"I'm here to listen," advised Detective Wilson.

The lawyer swung about in his swivel chair until he was comfortable. "Well, it begins about a year ago. Auntie—Mrs. Brockton—was having a bit of trouble."

"Trouble?" inquired Detective Wilson.

"Not your kind of trouble, not police trouble," said Mr. Davenport. "Physical trouble. We began to call her the Vanishing Lady."

Detective Wilson frowned. "Vanishing Lady?"

"Some kind of amnesia trouble," continued Samuel Davenport. "Started about a year ago. Walked out of the house, Auntie Brockton did, and simply vanished."

It happened on four occasions—once for a day, once for two days, again for a day, and another time for three days. Each time when she returned she had only vague, scattered recollections of where she had been.”

“Didn’t she see a doctor about it?” asked Wilson.

“Of course she did. The family physician—a fine man—he’s my own doctor, too—Dr. Eric Rosenbloom. Temporary amnesia, he called it. He explained to us that this condition was not unusual with a woman of Auntie’s age. Dr. Rosenbloom said it was nothing to worry about, that it would pass, and that, in the meantime, we should kind of keep an eye on her. He treated her and was quite successful in his treatment. But dear Auntie is not one for orthodox methods.”

“I don’t quite follow that.” Detective Wilson frowned.

“Auntie’s a great believer in astrology,” explained Mr. Davenport. “She learned the name of a good astrologer from one of her rich friends and thus consulted with Miss Della Medford. That was about six months ago. Auntie told Miss Medford of her troubles, and Miss Medford worked with her for a few weeks,

then advised that Auntie visit a psychiatrist. Della recommended Dr. Simon Torrance. Auntie went to him, and it *did* work out. She's had no more amnesia spells—not for the past six months. Dr. Rosenbloom has continued to see her, and he says that there may be another recurrence or two before he pronounces her officially cured, but so far she's been all right, no more the Vanishing Lady. We all feel, as he does, that she would have made the same kind of recovery without consulting anyone else. Anyway,” continued Samuel Davenport, puffing on his cigar, “that's how Auntie became acquainted with Della and Dr. Torrance, and they've become close friends. Nancy's become quite close to them also.”

“And Paul is quite close to Nancy,” piped up Chip.

Detective Wilson turned his head toward Chip.

Chip explained, “They're engaged.”

“Engaged?” inquired Wilson. “Paul and Nancy?”

“The youngster has it almost right,” corrected Mr. Davenport. “They're due to be engaged, formally engaged, quite shortly.”

“She's an heiress,” piped up Chip again.

Lawyer Davenport laughed delightedly.

"That young man is quite a detective himself, isn't he?"

"He's snoopy," chuckled Jack.

"Heiress?" queried Detective Wilson.

Davenport nodded. "In his will, Auntie's husband, who passed away, left two hundred thousand dollars to his niece Nancy Brockton. She is to receive this money on her twenty-first birthday, but there's a condition attached to it. I'm the executor of the will."

"What condition?" asked Wilson.

"If Auntie, Mrs. Anita Brockton, does not believe that Nancy is sufficiently mature to come into this wealth at the age of twenty-one, then Auntie can file an affidavit to that effect with the Surrogate at any time before Nancy's twenty-first birthday. Then the inheritance would be postponed until Nancy is thirty years old."

"And when will Nancy be twenty-one?" inquired Wilson.

"Day after tomorrow—Thursday," replied Mr. Davenport.

"And does Mrs. Brockton have any intention of stopping Nancy's inheritance?"

"Not that I know of," said the lawyer, puffing his cigar. "Nancy hasn't been flighty. She's been a sensible young lady and appears to know the value of money and how to handle it. She's given no reason for Auntie Brockton to want to postpone the inheritance. But Auntie, of course, has the right to change her mind at any time until Thursday. On Thursday, once Nancy is twenty-one, the money is hers and she can do as she pleases."

"Like getting formally engaged to your son?" chor-tled Detective Wilson.

"You've hit the nail on the head, Mr. Wilson. That's exactly what they have in mind. Once Nancy is assured of her inheritance, that's when they intend to announce their engagement."

"I see," mused Detective Wilson and then searched in his pockets until he produced his little pad. He studied it for a few minutes and said, "I think we've covered everybody who was at Mrs. Brockton's party except Paul and this Mr. Quincy."

"You can hit those two birds with one stone," declared Mr. Davenport. "Paul knows about Quincy; it was Paul who invited him to the party, and Paul has a little room right here with me in my office."

"May I speak with him, please?"

"Certainly, Mr. Wilson."

The gray-haired lawyer pressed a button on his desk and in a short time Paul Davenport entered.

Paul saw the boys on the couch and waved a salute.

"Hi, fellas."

"Hi, Paul."

"When are you guys going to return that ring?" Paul said, smiling.

"Do you think they have the ring?" interjected Wilson.

"Yes, sir, I do." Paul looked blankly at the man in the armchair.

"Oh, you two haven't met," remarked Mr. Davenport. "Mr. Wilson—my son, Paul. And this is Detective James Wilson, whom I mentioned to you, Paul. He's the man working on the recovery of Nancy's ring."

"Do you think the boys have it?" persisted Wilson.

"Yes, I do think so," said Paul, "but please don't get me wrong. I don't think they mean any harm. I think they're pulling some kind of wingding, playing some kind of game. I happen to agree with Auntie Brockton. Boys will be boys, and boys have their own kind of peculiar, nutty psychology. It's not so long ago I was their age, and I've got to admit I pulled off some pretty wild tricks at that time."

"Yes," grumbled Detective Wilson and looked down again to the little pad in his hand. "Your father mentioned a Mr. Quincy to me. He's the only one left I know nothing about. What's his first name?"

"Adam."

Abruptly the detective was on his feet.

"'Adam' did you say?"

"That's what I said, sir. Adam Quincy."

The boys could see that Detective Wilson was striving to contain his excitement.

"This Adam Quincy," rumbled the detective. "Is he a tall, powerful man, kind of moon-faced?"

"Yes," said Paul mildly. "That would kind of describe him."



"Is he a jeweler?" snapped Wilson. "Does he have an office at twenty-six West Forty-seventh Street?"

Bewildered, Paul's eyes bugged out of his head like round, gleaming marbles.

"Yes, that's right," he murmured.

"Is this man a friend of yours?" thundered Wilson.

"No, an acquaintance."

"How well do you know him?"

"Not well at all."

"How do you know him?"

"He belongs to the same athletic club that I do. We play handball together."

"Play handball together," repeated Wilson sarcastically. "Is that why you invited him to Mrs. Brockton's party?"

"No," bridled Paul. "That's not why. He seemed to be a nice man and a lonely man, a bachelor. I wanted him to have a pleasant evening with pleasant people. Anything wrong with that?"

"Nothing wrong with that," retorted Wilson and beckoned to the boys. "All right, gentlemen. Let's get a move on."

Outside in the corridor, as they walked rapidly toward the elevator, Detective Wilson grimly announced, "We may have a solution to this case faster than we thought."

11

Three-Time Loser

In the unmarked squad car, Detective Wilson informed them, “West Forty-seventh Street . . . that’s the heart of the jewelry area in New York City.”

The boys made no reply. They said nothing. Sitting tightly together in the front seat they realized that Detective Wilson was not, at that moment, in any mood for idle chatter.

The car stopped in front of a narrow, seedy building, pressed between many tall, imposing buildings. Detective Wilson shut off the motor, and they alighted.

In the dim, stuffy lobby, their three pairs of eyes gazed up to the directory on the wall. Adam Quincy’s number was 505.

They took a creaky self-service elevator to the fifth floor, where Wilson led them along a musty corridor to

505. It was a thick wooden door. It had no name on it, only the number.

Now Chip nudged Jack and furtively pointed toward Detective Wilson. Jack looked. Wilson had taken his gun out of its holster and was holding it in his right hand down along his thigh.

Wilson did not knock. His left hand grasped the knob of the door, turned it, and flung open the door. Simultaneously his right hand came up, leveling the gun.

The office was a single windowless room and nothing more. An overhead chandelier burned brightly. There was a wooden desk with a wooden swivel chair, four wooden armchairs, a long wooden bench, and a huge steel safe. That was all the room contained—except for the man sitting in the swivel chair at the desk.

The man had thick shoulders and a round, red face. When he looked up and saw Detective Wilson, he also had a pair of bulging, astonished eyes.

“Get up,” ordered Wilson, kicking the door closed.

Without a word, the man rose to his feet. He was tall

and powerful. Wilson went near him and tapped his clothes to see if he was armed.

"Not carrying a weapon?" growled Wilson.

"I gave that up a long time ago."

"So now kindly give up the ring."

"What ring?" quavered the red-faced man.

"The ring you stole from Mrs. Brockton's house last night."

"I didn't steal any ring. I swear to high heaven." The red face was now perspiring profusely, and a pudgy finger was pointing at Detective Wilson's gun. "Please put that away, Mr. Wilson. It—it makes me nervous."

"Sit down," Wilson ordered, indicating an armchair.

The red-faced man sat heavily.

"And, boys," said Detective Wilson, now smiling slightly, "you sit over there on that bench, out of the way."

The boys scampered to comply.

Wilson put away his gun in the holster inside his jacket.

Then he turned to the door, which had a heavy steel

inner bolt, and bolted the door.

"Is the desk open?" he asked Quincy.

"Yes."

"And the safe?"

"It is open."

Wilson searched through the drawers of the desk and then searched through the safe. Quite apparently, he was not satisfied.

He went to the man in the chair, grasped his lapels, pulled him up, and held him nose to nose.

"Quincy, you're a three-time loser. Three times you've been put behind bars as a jewel thief. This time, unless you cooperate, I'll see to it that you're put away for the rest of your life. *Now tell me where you have that ring!*"

"I don't have it," whimpered Adam Quincy. "I swear to you, Mr. Wilson, I don't have it." He looked thoroughly frightened.

Wilson released him and the man fell back into the chair.

While Wilson patiently stood over him, Quincy took a handkerchief from a pocket and wiped his face.

Then, almost ashamedly, he dabbed at his eyes. His shoulders quivered, and he began to sob. Adam Quincy was weeping like a child.

Softly now, quite sympathetically, Detective Wilson asked, "What's it all about, Adam?"

Seated over on the bench, the boys, even from that distance, could distinguish a change in Detective Wilson's attitude.

Adam Quincy ceased crying, dabbed once again at his eyes, and nervously crumpled the wet handkerchief in his hands.

"I've been out of jail for four years now," he implored. "I've gone straight, so help me. I've learned my lesson—please believe me. You can check with my probation officer. I'm a reformed man, Detective Wilson. I won't touch anything shady with a ten-foot pole. I admit it took a long time, but I've learned my lesson. I live quite simply, and I earn my livelihood by legitimate means only."

"What happened last night?" demanded Detective Wilson.

"What happened last night was the worst thing that

could have happened,” replied Adam Quincy. “To me.”

“Why?”

The red-faced man looked up pleadingly. “I’ve tried to make friends with fine people, good people. This young man, Paul Davenport, invites me to go to a party with fine, nice people. And then this thing happens—this thing with the ring. Can you imagine how I felt? With my record I knew that sooner or later the police would come barging in on me, accusing me. I kept praying that somehow, somewhere, that ring would be found—before you got around to me. And now, here you are.”

“You sure you’re not mixed up in this?”

“I’d have to be crazy,” begged Adam Quincy. “With my record I’d have to be simply insane, wouldn’t I? I’m there under my own name. A stolen ring, and the whole house has to fall down—on me! I’ve gone straight, I’m reformed, I’m doing all right. Why should I mix myself up with the law again? Please believe me, Mr. Wilson, I had nothing to do with it.”

“I’m inclined to believe you,” murmured Wilson.

"I thank you, sir."

"But if you're lying, then the house is *really* going to fall in on you."

"I'm not lying. Why should I be lying? I've got nothing to gain and all to lose. I'm telling you the gospel truth."

"All right, Adam," said Detective Wilson. "Cops are not ogres. You just stick with the straight and narrow and I'll back you up all the way." He beckoned to the boys. "Let's go, lads."

In the squad car as he delivered the boys home, Detective Wilson declared, "It's rough when you're a criminal with a record. You try to go straight, but a lot of people won't trust you. I know for a fact that Quincy's been trying to make his way legitimately since he was released from jail. I thought perhaps last night he gave way to temptation, but he convinced me that he's still on the straight and narrow, and more power to him. I believe him."

"Me, too," piped Chip.

"Well, I'm glad you're on my side." Detective Wil-

son laughed. "But just remember, young man, so far we've gotten absolutely nowhere solving this case. Unless," he added, "we go along with the theory of Paul Davenport and Auntie Brockton that you kids are pulling some kind of cock-eyed trick."

"We're not pulling any trick," Jack said soberly.

Later, when the boys were back home, Mr. Power called to say he would be delayed.

The boys fed Blaze and took him out for a walk. Then they had some cheese and crackers to hold back their appetite.

When Mr. Power arrived home, Jack had a fine dinner ready: tossed green salad; luscious spaghetti and meatballs; and for dessert, creamy rice pudding.

"Jack," said Chip, licking his chops, "when you grow up, you ought to be a chef in a fancy restaurant."

"So what's wrong with that?" demanded Jack.

"Who said 'wrong'?" replied Chip.

"An honorable profession," asserted their father. "Now, before I pack, tell me about your day."

"Pack," groaned Chip. "He's always packing."

"A photojournalist, a free-lance photographer, has to keep moving," Mr. Power said, laughing. "Got to make a living to take care of my sons."

"Where are you off to this time?" inquired Jack.

"Denver," said Mr. Power. "I'll be leaving very early tomorrow morning, before you chaps get up. Remember to take care of the mail, Jack. I'll call you tomorrow night; by then I'll know how long I'll be away. Now, if you please, tell me about your day. Detective Wilson said he was going to call on you. Anything new on the ring business?"

They told their dad about the adventures of the day; then they helped him pack. He retired before they did because he had to get up early the next morning.

They sat around for a while munching potato chips and watching television with Blaze, who was a great television fan; then, after watching the news and weather, they put out the lights and went to bed.

12

Surprise Package

On Wednesday, Jack awoke to a warm, humid, cloudy morning. He tiptoed into his dad's room, to find that Mr. Power had already departed.

There was a note on the dresser in Mr. Power's handwriting:

Chip and Jack, I'll call you some time this evening. Be good. Take care.

Love, Dad

Jack brought the note to Chip's room, but Chip was still asleep and so was Blaze, at the foot of Chip's bed. Jack left the note where Chip would see it and tiptoed out.

He showered and dressed, and then there was Blaze wagging for his breakfast. As Jack was feeding Blaze

in the kitchen, Chip came in, yawning and stretching.

"Good morning," said Chip.

"Morning," replied Jack. "Boy, you sure can sleep. Did you see Dad's note?"

"Yep," Chip said, yawning.

Jack grinned at his lazy brother.

"I'm taking Blaze out for his morning constitutional. If you're not dressed when I get back. . . ."

"I'll be dressed."

Chip was as good as his word. When Jack and the dog returned, Chip was already dressed and preparing breakfast. They had a hearty meal of orange juice, oatmeal, scrambled eggs, and sausages. Chip, always hungry and a rapid eater, finished before Jack.

"I'll go down for the mail," said Chip.

"Good idea," agreed his brother.

When Chip came back, Jack was washing the dishes.

"Anything?" asked Jack.

"Just some advertisements for Dad—and something for you from Detective Wilson."

"Something for me from Detective Wilson?" Jack

was puzzled. He wiped his hands on a kitchen towel and said, "Where?"

"In the living room."

It was a small package wrapped in brown paper. It was addressed in neat printing to Jack Power, and the return address was Police Headquarters.

Jack looked at it quizzically.

"Why do you say it's from Detective Wilson?"

"Well, who else," Chip replied, "would be sending you anything from Police Headquarters?"

Jack shrugged, then smiled. Chip was always logical.

With nimble fingers Jack removed the brown paper, revealing a small cardboard box. Perplexed, he just stood there squinting at it.

"Well, open it," cried Chip, virtually breathing down Jack's neck.

Carefully Jack removed the cover. Within the box, on a bed of cotton wadding, lay an object.

It was a diamond ring!

"Gosh!" breathed Chip.

Removing the ring from the box, Jack examined it carefully, then handed it to his brother.

"Read the inscription," he said in a hushed voice.

Chip inspected the inscription engraved inside the ring.

"'To Nancy from Uncle Charles,'" he read, and then he shouted to Jack, "It's Nancy Brockton's ring!" But Jack was furiously dialing the telephone.

Jack got through to Detective Wilson and immediately inquired, "Did you send me a package, sir?"

"Package? No, I didn't send you any package."

"Please listen," urged Jack, and he hurriedly related what had happened.

"Holy smoke!" roared Detective Wilson. "You lads stay put and hang on to everything! I'll be there in two shakes!"

When Detective Wilson arrived, the first thing he did was inspect the ring. Muttering under his breath, he placed it in his vest pocket; then he examined the brown paper wrapping.

"Clever," he said. "They couldn't go wrong."

Chip blinked. "Pardon?"

"Whoever mailed the ring," Wilson said, pointing



at the printed addresses, "made sure that Jack would be incriminated."

"Me?" Jack was astounded.

Detective Wilson smiled kindly.

"A stolen ring is incriminating evidence," he explained. "They mailed it to you, so there you would be—stuck with it. But they were clever. If anything went wrong with the mail, the return address was Police Headquarters. Then we would get it. And what would we get? The stolen ring—but addressed to Jack Power. And so, Jack Power would *still* be incriminated."

"But why are they picking on Jack?" demanded Chip.

Detective Wilson replied, "That's been our problem from the beginning, hasn't it?"

Chip nodded.

"What's the next step, sir? Do we return the ring now?"

"Not so fast, young man. Now that I have possession of the ring, there's some solid investigation I can do on it." Detective Wilson rather slowly, thoughtfully,

crossed the room to the telephone and called the Brockton home.

The maid, Maud, answered, "Brockton residence."

"May I talk with Nancy, please?"

"Who's calling?"

"Detective James Wilson."

"Just one moment, please."

Then Nancy's voice came through to him. "This is Nancy Brockton, Mr. Wilson."

"Miss Nancy, may the Power boys and myself come to call on you this evening? We may have some important information for you."

"This evening?" said Nancy. "I've a date to go to a play with Paul this evening. Can you make it earlier? Sometime this afternoon?"

Detective Wilson considered that.

"How about four o'clock?" he asked.

"Four o'clock will be fine," replied Nancy.

"Thank you, Miss Brockton. We'll see you at four."

Detective Wilson hung up.

"What's up?" asked Chip excitedly.

"We have a date with Miss Brockton at four."

“And in the meantime you’re going to do that solid investigation on the ring?”

“That I am, Mr. Chip.”

“Please, may we join you?” hazarded Chip.

“I’m afraid not, Mr. Chip. It’s a long and weary task I have to do. Routine police work.”

“And he can’t have amateurs tagging along with him,” added Jack.

“Well said.” Detective Wilson laughed and started for the door. “Got to go to work now, gentlemen. I’ll meet you at the Brockton home at four o’clock.”

“We’ll be there,” said Jack.

13 *An Unforeseen Development*

At four o'clock the boys climbed the stairs of the Brockton home and rang the bell. Maud opened the door for them.

"Come in, young gentlemen."

"Is Mr. Wilson here?" asked Chip.

"Not yet. But I believe he's expected."

She led them into the living room. Mrs. Brockton was there, along with Dr. Torrance, Della Medford, and Nancy, who looked rather glum. But Mrs. Brockton greeted them radiantly.

"Well, here they are, my dear pranksters," gurgled little Auntie Brockton. "Have you come to confess?" she said good-humoredly. "Is the joke finally over?"

Wisely the boys did not disclose the true reason for their visit.

"We're supposed to meet Mr. Wilson here," Jack said demurely.

At that moment the bell rang, and Maud ushered in Detective Wilson. He was unsmiling and his eyes were very serious.

"Ah, Detective Wilson," cried Auntie Brockton. "I believe you know everybody here."

"I do," replied Mr. Wilson and politely nodded to all.

"We've got to rush out," exclaimed Auntie, "Dr. Torrance, Della, and myself. We're going to have a late luncheon, or should I call it an early dinner?"

"Either way," said Detective Wilson.

"We're going to have Creole food, especially prepared by dear Della. She's from New Orleans, you know."

"New Orleans," said Detective Wilson politely. "No, I didn't know."

"But I'll be back at six o'clock or so," gushed Auntie. "Maud leaves at six, and Nancy is going to a play with Paul, so perhaps you can come back this evening, Detective Wilson. I'll be all alone in this house this evening."

Now Detective Wilson smiled. "Thank you for the invitation, but I must decline. Actually, I'm here to chat with Miss Nancy."

"Well, chat away," chortled Auntie. "Come on, Simon and Della, let's go eat Della's wonderful food. Good-bye, all."

Then the boys and Detective Wilson were alone with Nancy Brockton.

"Any news?" inquired Nancy.

"Would this be news?" demanded Detective Wilson, producing the diamond ring. "This *is* your ring, no question about it?"

Nancy took the ring, examined it, and nodded.

"Yes, it is," she said severely. "It's my ring. Where'd you get it?"

"United States Postal Service," Wilson stated dryly.

Nancy's eyes narrowed. "I beg your pardon?"

"Jack Power received it in this morning's mail."

"A likely story." Nancy frowned.

"I happen to know it's a true story," declared Detective Wilson.

Nancy met that statement with a grimace.

"Well, of course," she cried. "It's all clear to me now. As I said all along, they hid it. Then they got it from the hiding place, but knew it was dangerous to keep it around on their persons. So they mailed it to themselves."

"That's a lie," growled Chip.

"Most clever of you to have discovered this," pursued Nancy to Detective Wilson. "Are they still trying to deny it? Still trying to brazen their way through? Is that why you arranged this meeting, sir?"

Sternly Detective Wilson ordered, "That's just about enough of that, young lady!"

Nancy stiffened at his tone.

"How dare you speak to me in that manner?" she demanded.

Detective Wilson ignored that question and continued in precisely the same tone, "Miss Brockton, I wish to inform you that I have learned the name of the person who mailed that ring to Jack Power."

"You have?" she asked. "Would you tell me?"

"I'd be glad to oblige," said Detective Wilson. "That person's name is—*Nancy Brockton!*"

14

The Riddle of the Ring

The boys looked at one another in utter bewilderment.

Detective Wilson paced up and down, his hands clasped behind him.

Nancy, deathly pale, stood frozen motionless.

"Miss Brockton," said Detective Wilson, "I knew there was something funny about this right from the beginning. Unfortunately, you picked the wrong boys. They happen to be extremely honest young men. Yet you insisted, definitely, that Jack Power plunged the house into darkness, struggled with you, and wrested that ring from your finger. Jack Power could no more do anything like that than take wing right now and fly around this room. So I knew there was something funny, but until today I didn't know what it was."

"Today?" Chip's throat felt dry as he swallowed.

"Once that ring came into my possession," continued Detective Wilson, "I finally had something solid to work with. As a matter of police routine, I checked it out with various pawnshops in the city. Guess what I discovered, Miss Brockton?"

Her pallor was dreadful. She looked ill. She made no sound.

"I discovered that this very ring had been pawned two months ago! This ring," thundered Detective Wilson, "which was supposed to have been stolen Monday night, *was in fact in pawn for the past two months!*"

"But how can that possibly be?" questioned Jack. "I saw her wearing the ring Monday night."

Detective Wilson disregarded Jack's remark.

"And the person who pawned that ring," declared Detective Wilson, "fits your description exactly, Miss Brockton."

She seemed about to faint. She wavered, then slid weakly into an armchair. But still she said nothing.

"Furthermore," continued Detective Wilson, "the ring was taken out of pawn yesterday. It had been

placed in pawn for ten thousand dollars two months ago. The ten thousand was paid yesterday and the ring taken out of pawn by a person exactly fitting your description."

"But I saw it on her finger Monday night," persisted Jack.

Detective Wilson went near the seated Nancy. "You have two alternatives," he said. "Either you tell me the entire truth and admit all, or you deny everything and I take you to that pawnshop to be identified."

The girl began to sob. She sought a handkerchief, but did not have one. Detective Wilson offered a large clean handkerchief and she accepted it gratefully. He stood aside until she ceased crying.

"Well?" he asked, but quite kindly now.

"I—I admit it," she sobbed.

Jack frowned, completely puzzled.

"But I saw that ring on her finger Monday night," he said for the third time.

"You thought you did," sobbed Nancy.

"I swear I did," insisted Jack.

"It's up to you to solve this riddle, Miss Brockton,"

declared Detective Wilson, looking straight at her.

She wiped her eyes, already swollen from weeping. Then she sank back in the chair and looked up pleadingly.

"I can explain it all," she offered.

"That's precisely why we're here, Miss Brockton," advised Wilson.

The girl sighed tremulously. "Two months ago, I—I had need of money—ten thousand dollars. I brought the ring to the pawnshop and got the money, but first I had a cheap duplicate made—an exact copy of the ring, but a cheap duplicate."

"Why the cheap duplicate?" inquired Detective Wilson.

"I didn't want my aunt to know," replied Nancy. "If I wore the duplicate, Auntie wouldn't know the difference."

"Why didn't you want your aunt to know?" snapped Wilson.

"Thursday," answered Nancy, "that's tomorrow, I'll be twenty-one. On that day I come into my inheritance, two hundred thousand dollars. But Auntie has the



right to postpone that inheritance at any time before I'm twenty-one for a period of nine years, or until I'm thirty. I didn't want that to happen, but if Auntie learned that I was running around secretly hocking valuable rings in pawnshops, then she might have done just that—postponed my inheritance. That's why I didn't want her to know."

"I see." Detective Wilson nodded.

The girl was sobbing again and they waited until she had herself under control. Finally she said, "Then Monday night there was the party. I was wearing the fake ring. Then it turned out that Mr. Quincy was a jeweler, and Auntie asked him to appraise my ring. I was frantic, of course."

"Sure," concurred Chip, nodding vigorously. "A phony ring and Mr. Quincy a jeweler, that would pop the whole deal."

"Just then," Nancy continued thickly, "the bell rang and I ran to the door. It was Jack Power with Auntie's proofs. Please understand my situation—I was desperate. So, there in the vestibule, while he was leaning out the window calling to Chip and Blaze, I tripped the

main switch in the fuse box myself and caused the blackout in the house. Then I grabbed him and struggled with him, but in the darkness I pulled the ring from my own finger and dropped it into the umbrella stand there in the vestibule. Then when the lights came on I accused him of stealing the ring; that way there could be no appraisal of the false ring by the jeweler, Mr. Quincy." Nancy Brockton's swollen eyes turned toward Jack. "Please," she pleaded. "Please forgive me."

Jack felt sorry for the poor girl. He smiled somewhat bashfully.

"Forget it," he said.

Nancy continued with her tale. "Then yesterday morning I went to Paul and persuaded him to borrow ten thousand dollars for me. It would not be difficult for Paul—his dad has many rich clients. Paul did that for me, but I swore him to secrecy."

"When would you return this money to Paul?" asked Detective Wilson.

"My aunt has the right to postpone my inheritance until noon Thursday, tomorrow. After twelve o'clock

Thursday, I own that two hundred thousand dollars. As soon as it was paid over to me, I would return the money that Paul had borrowed."

Wilson smiled faintly.

"Proceed," he said.

"I got the ring out of pawn," explained Nancy, "and mailed it to Jack Power. I knew—I heard you in court, Detective Wilson—that he was a fine and honest boy, and I knew that then the ring would be returned to me. The boys would still be mixed up in it, but only until tomorrow noon. Then, once I was certain of my inheritance, I would tell the truth and clear them completely." She was weeping again. "But you were just too smart for me, sir. And now . . . now . . . when Auntie learns of all of this. . . ."

Detective Wilson glanced at the boys.

The boys, quite obviously, were sympathetic to poor Nancy's predicament.

"What happened to the duplicate ring?" asked Detective Wilson. "The one in the umbrella stand?"

"Late that night, after we returned from court," answered Nancy, "I stole downstairs, retrieved the fake

ring from the umbrella stand, and hid it." She stood up and returned Detective Wilson's handkerchief. "I hid it in my bedroom. If you'll excuse me for a moment, I'll show you just where."

Nancy hurried out of the room.

Detective Wilson stared at the boys. The boys stared at Detective Wilson. Then Chip broke the silence.

"Look," he said. "Why don't we play along with her?"

"Only until tomorrow noon," agreed Jack. "After that she has her inheritance and doesn't have to worry about her aunt. The ring is back and the aunt will still think we're a couple of pranksters who got tired of the joke and returned the ring. Then, after tomorrow noon, we're in the clear and everybody lives happily afterward. What do you think, Detective Wilson?"

Wilson grinned contentedly. His case was solved and nobody had been hurt.

"It's your decision, gentlemen," said Wilson, with a paternal smile. "You've suffered and therefore you can vote to pardon the one who, out of sheer desperation, I admit, made you suffer."

"I vote to pardon," Chip interposed.

"Pardon," echoed Jack.

Nancy came back with a towel over her arm and a jar of cold cream in her hand. Silently she unscrewed the cap from the jar, dug her slim fingers down into it, and brought a ring up from its depths.

"This is the fake," she declared, "and that's where I hid it."

"Okay, put it back," said Detective Wilson.

She looked at him hopefully, then did as she was told. The ring back in the jar, she screwed on the cap and then wiped her hands on the towel.

A contrite expression on her pale face, she looked from Chip to Jack. Then, resolutely, she turned to Detective Wilson.

"Would you please refrain from reporting any of this," she begged, "until noon tomorrow? After that I'm free to tell all, and I shall do just that—I promise you." Again her gaze was on the boys. "I know I've been wicked to you, but I think you understand my reasons now. Could you have it in your hearts to bear with me for just another day? After that I shall clear

you completely”—she was weeping again—“and you will have earned my eternal gratitude.”

“The boys have already voted on that subject,” Detective Wilson informed her.

“How?” she gasped.

“In your favor,” declared Wilson.

“Thank you, thank you,” she cried and flew to Jack and kissed his cheek.

“I voted, too,” advised Chip.

Nancy hugged Chip and tried to kiss his cheek, but he moved and got kissed square on the nose.

“Well, happy inheritance,” Chip said, laughing, “and I think it’s time we got out of here, don’t you, Jack?”

They said their good-byes and Detective Wilson went back to Police Headquarters and the boys went home.

15

A New Riddle

At eight o'clock that Wednesday evening, Dick Donovan unexpectedly came visiting.

"Hi! I come bearing a bonanza," he announced.

"Bonanza?" inquired Jack.

"Three free ducats to the opening night of a big movie," Dick offered. "A big shot dropped them off at home for Mom, Dad, and me. But Mom and Dad have other plans, so the tickets have become mine to do with as I choose. I choose you two guys to come along as my guests."

"Opening night, no less," admired Jack.

"Aside from the movie," said Dick, "we'll see all the celebrities in their evening gowns and tuxedos."

"Evening gowns and tuxedos," scoffed Chip disdainfully. "Bah!"

"Bah?" Dick echoed, laughing. "That's the sound of a sheep."

"I'm no sheep," Chip retorted. "Sheep are people that go trailing after celebrities in evening gowns and tuxedos."

"Yes, sir," remarked Dick, shaking his head. "Old Chipper sure *is* the cynic in this family."

"No cynic," defended Jack. "He thinks straight and he's got a level head. That's old Chip for you."

"No, really," Chip protested. "I don't feel like celebrities. I just feel like lying around and relaxing and reading a good book. Furthermore, Dad's going to be calling from Denver, and somebody's got to be here to answer. You go, Jack. Have a good time."

"Okay?" asked Jack earnestly.

"Sure. Enjoy it."

Dick said, "So get moving, Jack. We'll just about make it."

"All right, Chip?"

"Didn't I say it already?" complained the ever logical Chip. "Get moving," he said with a grin, "and enjoy the celebrities."

With Jack and Dick gone, Chip was stretched on the couch, reading, when at eight-thirty the phone rang. It was Mr. Power.

"How goes it, Son?" inquired Mr. Power.

"All's well, Dad."

"Jack home with you?"

"No, he went to a movie with Dick Donovan."

"Have you heard anything from Detective Wilson on that ring affair?"

"But, Dad, did we hear!" cried Chip and rapidly related all the occurrences of the day. At the end he asked, "Did we do right by Miss Nancy, Dad?"

"Yes, I think so," assured Mr. Power in slow tones. "Two wrongs don't make a right. You know how greatly I believe in kindness and compassion."

"You bet I do," said Chip, "and so do your kids, Dad. That's why we did what we did. That's the way you brought us up."

"Well, thank you, Chip. That's as nice a compliment as I'd ever want."

"Think nothing of it," chuckled Chip.

"And now for the sad news," said Mr. Power.

"What, Dad?"

"I'm going to be stuck out here until Saturday."

"Gee," lamented Chip.

"But there's always a silver lining," Mr. Power said gently.

"Silver lining?" inquired Chip.

"After Saturday, I'm going to be free for a full month. You and I and Jack are going to do a great many things together. Movies, plays, museums, libraries, ball games—all together."

"Great!" enthused Chip.

"Now, what about the proofs?"

Chip clapped his free hand to his forehead.

"Proofs?" he moaned.

"Mrs. Brockton's proofs. I hope she has selected the proofs; she wanted the finished portraits for tomorrow. The big job's done; I mean the photos are taken. You and Jack can develop the negatives as well as I can. Which ones did she pick, Chip?"

"Dad," Chip admitted, "there's been so much excitement around here, the proofs just clean slipped our minds. Look, I'll call her the minute you hang up."

"Maybe she won't be home."

"She'll be home," Chip assured his father. "She told us. Matter of fact, she told us she'll be home all alone. Miss Medford and Dr. Torrance were right there when she told us that. Paul and Nancy were going to a play. She'll be home all alone."

"Fine," said Mr. Power. "Call her and tell her, but tell her exactly the truth. If she's against you and Jack doing the developing of the negatives—well, tough luck. But if she approves and has selected the proofs she wants, then you and Jack do a good, careful job, and deliver the finished product to her as we promised—by tomorrow."

"If she approves, I'll pick up the proofs tonight."

"Good boy."

"Okay, Dad. You'd better hang up. It must be expensive calling all the way from Denver."

"That's my Chip," Mr. Power said with a laugh. "All right, Son. Give my love to Jack."

"Bye, Dad."

"Bye, Chip."

Chip hung up, checked out the Brockton telephone

number, and called. Auntie Brockton's cheerful voice answered quickly.

"Hello?"

"Mrs. Brockton?"

"This is she."

"Chip Power here."

"Well, hello, young Chip," sang Mrs. Brockton.

"Mrs. Brockton, about the proofs for your photo portraits. Have you selected those you want?"

"I have indeed, young man," replied Auntie Brockton. "I've marked the ones I like."

"Excellent," said Chip, very businesslike. "Now, Mrs. Brockton, my dad is away on business in Denver. My brother and I are expert developers and we do it all the time for our dad. If you want your portraits for tomorrow, Jack and I will do them for you perfectly. The main job is done—the picture taking. Dad'll be back on Saturday, and if you'd rather he did the developing then, that's up to you. And if those arrangements aren't suitable, then there's no charge for any of the services already rendered."

"Young Mr. Chip, you're a darling lad," said Auntie

Brockton, giggling. "Thank you for telling me all of the facts. I should like the photos for tomorrow, and I'm certain that you and your brother will do an admirable job developing the proofs I've marked."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Chip and added, still businesslike, "unless you're perfectly satisfied with the finished product—no charge."

"I've a grand feeling I'll be most happily satisfied," Auntie Brockton merrily assured him. "You may pick up the proofs any time this evening."

"I'm practically on my way," replied Chip.

"No rush," chirped Auntie. "I expect to be up quite late. There's a movie I'm dying to see on TV."

"Okay," said Chip. "See you later."

"Very good. You're a fine young man," sang Auntie. "Good-bye now."

Chip cradled the receiver.

He washed up, put on a light jacket, and went out into a hot, dark, cloudy night.

By now he knew the route to the Brockton home quite thoroughly, and he confidently strolled through the summer night.

Walking up Riverside Drive, but still some distance away from Auntie's, he saw a dark-red station wagon, its tail gate open, in front of the whitestone Brockton house.

Up from the basement exit of the house came a man in a dark suit and a dark hat. Chip could not possibly distinguish his features, but he was a tall man carrying a rolled-up brown army blanket over one shoulder. Chip could have sworn he saw a pair of little shoes hanging out one end of the army blanket, but the light from the dark summer sky was tricky. Before Chip could decide whether or not the little pair of shoes was an optical illusion, the man had placed the rolled-up blanket into the station wagon and slammed shut the tail gate. Then the man trotted to the front of the car, jumped into the driver's seat, and the station wagon roared off into the night.

Chip arrived at the house and climbed up the entrance steps. He rang the bell and waited. No answer. He rang again. Again no answer. Now he held his thumb on the bell for a long time and could hear the sound of the bell clanging inside. No answer.

Finally he gave up. He shrugged, skipped down the stairs, and walked home. There he was greeted by Blaze, who leaped up and licked his face.

When Jack returned to the apartment, he found Chip sleepily sprawled on the couch in the living room. Chip held a book in his right hand, and within the crook of Chip's left arm Blaze was comfortably curled, contentedly snoring.

"Hi," Chip murmured. "How was the movie?"

"Eh," said Jack.

"And the celebrities?"

"Eh," said Jack. "It was okay, but you didn't miss anything. Dad call?"

"Sure did," said Chip and, with a yawn, got off the couch and stretched wearily.

"You're not very communicative," grumbled Jack.

"Sleepy," mumbled Chip. But then he related the facts of their dad's call, his almost-visit to Mrs. Brockton, and the queer business about the army blanket and the station wagon.

"You sure about the little pair of shoes dangling out

the end of that rolled-up army blanket?" asked Jack, peering at his brother in ill-concealed amazement.

"I'm not sure at all," replied Chip sleepily. "In the light of a cloudy night, you know how the eyes can play tricks. All I can say is, it sure did look like a little pair of shoes."

"On that note," Jack replied with a chuckle, "I suggest we go to bed."

"You just talked me into it, brother Jack. Good night, Jack. Good night, Blaze."

Blaze opened one eye, slowly waved his tail, and went back to sleep.

16

Chip Investigates

Thursday morning, after breakfast, the boys took Blaze out for a romp in Central Park. It was a cool, clear morning; golden sunshine shimmered down from a bright blue sky.

Near the baseball field, Chip threw a stick for Blaze, and Blaze exercised by running for the stick, retrieving it, and laying it at Chip's feet.

Then a group of boys asked them to join a choose-up-sides game of ball. Jack accepted; Chip declined.

Chip, with Blaze, lounged in the sunlit grandstand and watched as Jack's team got trimmed.

Then they went home. A sweaty and tired Jack went to the shower, and Chip went to the phone.

He called the Brockton home. Nancy answered.

"Nancy," Chip said, "your aunt marked the proofs

she wanted developed. May I come over and pick them up? I mean, may I come over now?"

"If you wish," replied Nancy. "I have the envelope with the proofs."

"Thank you," said Chip. "See you soon."

He hung up, opened the bathroom door, and called in, "Jack."

"What?"

"I'm going over to pick up Mrs. Brockton's proofs."

"Fine," called Jack. "Come back with them right away. I'll be waiting. Then we'll do the job and deliver them on time. Hey, Chip."

"What?"

"You better call first."

"I just did that. I talked with Nancy."

When Nancy hung up the phone, she turned worriedly to Della Medford. They were alone in the living room.

"When I came home last night," Nancy said, "I simply thought she was asleep. But then, when she didn't come down to breakfast this morning, I looked

into her bedroom. The bed was still made. She hadn't gone to bed at all, and she was nowhere in the house. That means she wandered out sometime last night."

"Nancy dear," Della consoled her, "it's not as though it were the first time. She's always turned up, hasn't she? Have you called the Missing Persons Bureau?"

"Yes, and they said they'd call me back."

When Chip rang, Maud opened the door and ushered him into the living room, where he found Nancy, wan and distraught, in the company of the dark and beautiful Della Medford.

For a moment Nancy looked at him blankly.

"The proofs," he reminded her.

"Oh, yes."

At that moment the phone rang.

Nancy answered. It was the Missing Persons Bureau. They had no news for her about her aunt.

Nancy hung up and explained to Chip, "It's Auntie. She has these amnesia attacks. We thought she was all cured, but she wandered off again last night. The bad part is, when she comes back she never really remem-

bers where she's been or what happened to her. She always has some crazy story—just vague, scattered memories—that doesn't make sense." Nancy sighed, then smiled weakly at Chip. "I always burden you with my troubles, don't I?"

"Well, not really." Chip tried to comfort her.

Nancy brought the envelope with the proofs.

"Auntie marked the ones she wanted."

"Yes, she told me." Chip accepted the manila envelope which contained the proofs. "We'll have the finished photos ready," he said. "Whenever your aunt gets back, please let us know and we'll bring them over. And I do hope she gets back soon."

"Thank you, Chip. You're a dear."

"Good-bye, then. Good-bye, Miss Medford."

Chip went out and down the stairs.

Walking slowly, he stopped suddenly at the corner. There, parked at the curb, was a dark-red station wagon!

"Gosh," he thought, "it sure looks like the same one I saw last night." Last night! Nancy had said Auntie Brockton was missing since then! When he

had talked with her on the phone last night, she had certainly sounded in fine condition—not like an amnesia victim.

He stood quite still, a shiver of excitement passing through him.

Was it possible that she had been abducted? Were the little shoes hanging out one end of that rolled-up army blanket the shoes on Auntie's feet? Was it Auntie Brockton rolled up inside that blanket? But who would want to kidnap that sweet little old lady?

One part of Chip told him to move on. "Move on, go home," that part of him said. "Don't start up with a new adventure. You and Jack were cleared recently of being thieves. Why look for new trouble?" But another part of Chip said, "If Auntie Brockton was really abducted, you can't just walk away from it, can you?"

Chip kept debating with himself. "Maybe it's just another dark-red station wagon, not the same one." He walked nearer to it, examining it keenly. It looked the same. He cast a glance about. There was no one near. With wildly beating heart, he quickly opened the tail gate and looked in.

There it was, inside—the brown army blanket!

What to do? Find a phone booth? Call Detective Wilson? Call Jack and tell him? But by then the station wagon quite possibly would be gone! Sure, he could give them the license number, but what would that prove?

No, he decided. You must take the bull by the horns! Act first and talk afterward! Investigate!

But how? What to do?

There was but one thing to do, and Chip did it.

Still holding on to the manila envelope with the proofs, he climbed into the station wagon, pulled the tail gate closed, and crawled under the brown army blanket.

In time—he did not know how long, but it seemed a long time—he heard the station wagon's motor churn, and then the station wagon rode off.

He was fearfully hot beneath the stuffy wool blanket, but he was glad to be moving finally.

They rode for about fifteen minutes. Then the station wagon tilted as it rode up an incline and stopped. He heard footsteps and then a steel door being rolled up. Footsteps again, the driver getting in behind the wheel, the station wagon slowly being driven into an enclosure. Some kind of garage, Chip decided.

Once again the station wagon stopped. Footsteps again, going out. Then the sound of the steel door being rolled down, and the sound of its being locked from the outside.

Silence.

Chip waited. Then he removed the blanket and just sat there in the stuffy interior of the station wagon. It was blistering hot and he was wet with perspiration.

He drew a deep sigh; mopped his face with his handkerchief; pocketed the handkerchief; and, still hanging on to the envelope with the proofs, climbed out and slammed the tail gate behind him.

He was in some kind of warehouse. It was dim and dank and eerie, full of cobwebs. One tiny light burned high up in the dome of a lofty ceiling.

He looked about. It was a vast room with a concrete floor and contained many curious, old-fashioned objects and statues. It appeared to be a warehouse for antiques.

There to his right was an object that set his heart to pounding! It looked like a coffin, its hinged cover standing open.

Upon closer examination he confirmed that it was a thick-walled, shiny-black, ebony casket—some kind of ancient chest about six feet long, three feet wide, and three feet high. Chip shuddered.

Now he looked again at the license plate of the station wagon to make certain he had memorized its license number. Then he proceeded forward to the steel roll-down entrance door and tried it. Of course it was locked. He was locked in!

Now he walked the other way, toward the rear of the dusty, dim, silent warehouse. There he found a thin wooden door. He tried the knob. The door was locked, but suddenly from beyond the thin door he heard sounds that tingled a screeching panic within him—faint, muffled, peculiar sounds.

Rats?

Shivering, he backed away. What had he gotten himself into?

His heels ominously clicking on the concrete floor, Chip moved about, inspecting. There were cobwebbed, dirty windows through which only the very faintest of daylight could filter. And every window had thick, strong bars. He put his forehead against one of the windows and peered out—they were about four feet up from the street. Except for the bars, it would be an easy jump. But no jump. He was locked in.

He kept moving in the smelly, hot, dust-filled dimness, inspecting, looking about. Then along one wall, up close to his eye level, he saw a wide, thick, round iron disc with an iron bolt for a latch.

He shoved up the iron latch and pulled open the iron disc; beyond was a round window, like a large porthole. But this window had no bars because the bolted iron disc was the protection.

The window opened inward, and Chip tugged until it opened. He was thankful for the blast of fresh air, but he was thankful for more. Now, no matter what, there was a way out. If necessary, he could shinny up and slip through.

He felt as though a heavy burden had been removed from him. He continued his inspection, but with more confidence now and less fear. There *was* a way out.

A yellowed, crinkly piece of paper on the floor caught his attention. He picked it up, studied it, and saw, faintly stamped on it, WAREHOUSE DELIVERY. He let the paper flutter out of his hands, thinking grimly, "Well, at least now I *know* I'm in a warehouse."

He kept wandering about the huge one-room

enclosure and then, back by the coffin-like chest—there in a gloomy corner, grimy and cobwebby—a wall phone.

“I hope it works,” Chip prayed.

Gingerly he lifted the grimy receiver and put it to his ear. A dial tone! It worked!

Swiftly he dialed his home number, and almost immediately Jack answered.

“Jack,” Chip whispered. “I’m in a warehouse.”

“Warehouse!” Jack’s anger burned through the wires. “I’ve been worried stiff waiting for you. I called the Brocktons’. Nancy said you left hours ago. Where are you? What are you up to?”

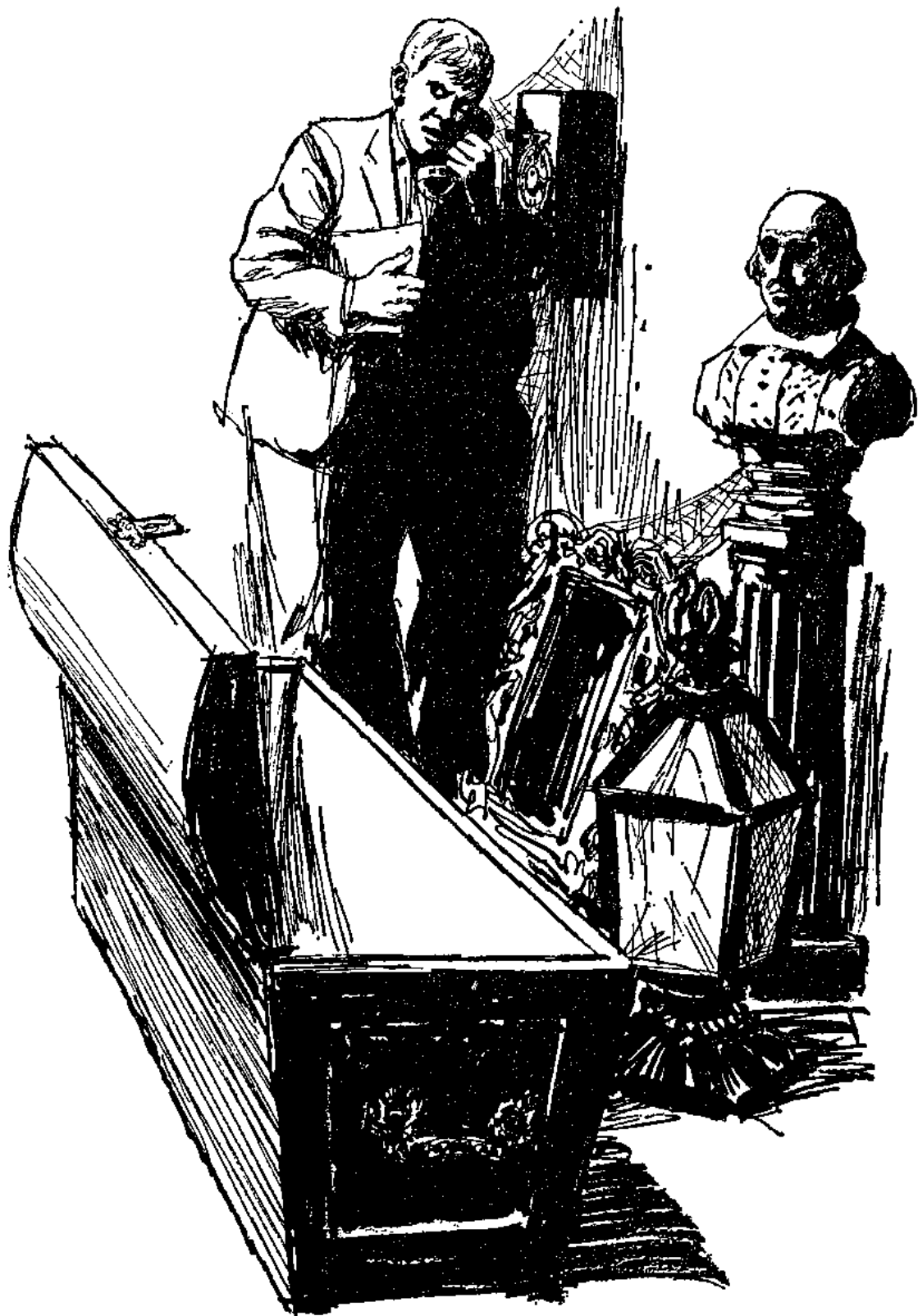
“I’m in a warehouse,” Chip whispered. “Just a minute . . . I’m looking at the phone number.” It was barely visible beneath the dirt, but Chip could make it out. “‘CH two—nine nine seven zero.’”

“Why are you whispering?” Jack demanded. “Talk up. I can hardly hear you.”

“Did you get the phone number?”

“Yes. Now tell me where you are.”

“I don’t know the address.”



"Chip, what *are* you up to?"

"Mrs. Brockton. She's disappeared."

"That's none of your business. You come right home."

"Jack, remember the station wagon I told you about last night? Well, what happened is that I came out of the Brockton house with the proofs—"

There were footsteps outside by the sheet-metal door!

Abruptly Chip hung up and looked about wildly for a place to hide.

The chest! The coffin-like box!

Still holding the envelope, he leaped into the box, pulled down the heavy cover, and heard it click over him.

He lay stretched like a corpse in total blackness.

All of the wood of the coffin-like box was thick and sturdy, and it served as a shield for the outside sounds. Very faintly Chip heard the metal door roll up. As though from a great distance, he heard voices, but could not distinguish them. Then—nothing. Silence.

After a time, he heard the car motor start up. Then

he heard the station wagon backing out and the metal door closing. Then again—silence.

Perspiring in the heat of the suffocating blackness, he waited until he was absolutely certain there were no more sounds. Then he pushed up the cover to get out.

The cover did not move!

Immediately he realized that the click he had heard when he pulled down the cover was the sound of an automatic lock shutting him in.

He struggled to get out. He fought, he kicked, he pushed, he pressed—the coffin-like box was as sturdy as steel.

He was securely locked in! He could not get out!

Now Chip Power lay very still, not fighting the box anymore, but struggling against the panic that was engulfing him.

What to do? What to do now?

Bit by bit the panic subsided and he was able to think clearly.

“I must not struggle. I must not move. I must not use up whatever oxygen there is in this black box

prison. I must not breathe too deeply. I have read about things like this. A person can live for an hour—perhaps two hours, three—depending upon how much oxygen he uses up. It is not a small box; it is, in fact, a quite large box. If I'm quiet, if I don't breathe too deeply, if I don't waste the oxygen in useless motion, then I can survive for a time without suffocating. Jack! I did get through to Jack! Jack will come! Jack will find me!" He prayed that Jack would come in time.

He thought he heard a phone ringing.

But was it the ringing in his ears?

He fought off the impulse to struggle again.

"Lie still, lie still," he told himself. "Conserve whatever air there is in this prison you're locked into."

Imprisoned within the coffin of blackness, the fifteen-year-old boy did not cry. He lay quietly, breathing shallowly. Only his lips moved. He was praying.

When Chip hung up that abruptly, Jack remained with a silent receiver in his hand. He tapped the bar of the phone, but the connection was dead. He hung up and paced about the room.

Whatever it was the kid was up to, it was important. From the tense sound of Chip's voice and the whispering, Jack realized that Chip, whatever it was, was deeply involved. He had been angry when first Chip had called, but now he was no longer angry—he was rather uneasy.

Jack paced up and down the living room, thinking.

Warehouse. Chip had said he was in a warehouse. And it had something to do with Mrs. Brockton. Chip said Mrs. Brockton had disappeared.

Jack wanted to call Nancy Brockton to inquire about

that, but he did not dare. He wanted to keep the phone open. With Chip hanging up so suddenly, some danger had obviously come near. Now he waited for Chip to call back. When the danger—whatever it was—passed, Chip would certainly call back.

Jack paced, the blood in his veins tingling with suppressed excitement. Chip had given him a phone number. He could call Chip back himself. But that wouldn't be wise. If there was danger, a call from him to Chip would only aggravate that danger. He must wait. He must wait for Chip to call back.

He paced, looking at his watch, waiting for Chip to call, but the phone did not ring.

Finally, after fifteen minutes of pacing and waiting, Jack called the number Chip had given him.

He heard the lonely rasp of the phone ringing on the other end, but there was no answer. He tried again. No answer.

Frankly worried now, Jack acted fast. He called Information, gave Information the phone number, and requested the address.

"Sorry," Information replied. "We do not give

addresses from phone numbers.”

Jack called the number again. No answer.

Now he seized the phone directory and frantically flipped the pages to *WAREHOUSES*. There were many warehouses, but he did not look at names. He ran his finger down the right side of the pages, checking phone numbers. Finally he hit the number he was seeking—CH two—nine nine seven zero. He slid his finger to the name and address corresponding to the phone number and read: “Tripod Warehouse, one forty-four MacDougal Street.”

MacDougal Street. That was somewhere in Greenwich Village.

He burst out of the apartment and down into the street and there hailed a taxi.

19

Sounds and More Sounds

One forty-four MacDougal Street was a dark, squat, flaky building on a quiet corner. Its entrance was a massive, roll-down steel door with a large white button to one side.

Jack pressed an anxious finger against the white button. He heard a hollow ringing inside, but no one answered. He stood back, nervously clenching and unclenching his hands. He walked about the building, inspecting its paint-peeled sides. Its dirty windows were closed and were protected by heavy iron bars.

But there—that round window like a large port-hole—it was open!

Without a moment's hesitation, Jack jumped, grabbed the ledge of the window, pulled himself up, and wriggled through. His hands hit first, but he

lightly doubled into a somersault and landed safely. On his feet now, he looked about. He was in a damp, dim, silent warehouse, dirty and cobwebbed, containing spooky old objects and statues.

On tiptoe on the concrete floor, Jack carefully moved about, seeking some clue to the whereabouts of his brother. He came to the grimy wall phone and checked the number on the dial. Yes, it was the number Chip had given him. Chip had been right here at this phone.

He wanted to call out Chip's name, but did not dare.

What to do? What was the next step?

He saw the black, coffin-like casket and sat down on it, resting, thinking what to do.

Chip had said something about a station wagon. There was certainly enough room in the immense place for a station wagon, and the steel entrance door was wide enough to drive through, but—Jack shook his head—no station wagon.

Now he caught sight of the thin door in the rear. Was it locked? he wondered.

If open, should he barge in? Or, right now,

without further ado, should he call Detective Wilson?

Nervously drumming his fingers on the wooden top of the casket upon which he was sitting, Jack pondered his problem.

Suddenly he leaped to his feet, his blood running cold!

He had heard a sound from within the casket! He had heard a tap, as though in answer to his own fingers tapping!

Pulse pounding, he stared down at the antique ebony chest.

Then he knelt next to it and rapped with a knuckle.

A faint tap came back in answer.

He tried to lift the cover of the box. He could not budge it.

He rapped twice, sharply.

Two faint taps came back in answer.

Throwing caution to the winds, he yelled, "Chip! *Chip!*"

A succession of faint taps came from within the casket.

Frantically he tugged at the cover of the box, almost

ripping off his fingernails. No luck at all. He examined it more carefully. There was a lock which needed a key.

Now he sprang to his feet, looking about desperately. There—in a corner! An iron bar with a thin end! It could serve as a crowbar.

He ran to it, seized it, ran back, wedged the thin end beneath the edge of the cover of the black box, and pried. The lock was strong. The cover held. But bit by bit, the thin end of the iron bar wedged in farther and farther, giving it more grip, making it a better lever. Jack worked feverishly, perspiring, straining, his muscles aching, until at last the lock yielded. There was a whining, ripping sound, and the lock broke!

Jack flung away the iron bar. With trembling hands he lifted the heavy cover. There was Chip, pale as death, flat on his back, one hand still clutching the envelope with the proofs.

Chip's eyelids fluttered. His hair was wringing wet, his face was bathed in perspiration, and his breathing was a gurgling rattle. But Chip was Chip. His trembling lips managed to produce a grin.

"How long did you expect me to wait here for you?" he croaked humorously, but Jack could see how strenuously the boy was fighting to hold back his tears.

"A fine place you picked to wait," Jack replied in the same humorous vein, but his voice broke out of sheer fright. Thank goodness he had arrived in time.

Jack reached in and helped his brother out, the heavy cover of the casket slamming closed.

Chip tottered. Jack held him. Chip blinked and shook his head, drops of perspiration falling from his face. He was weak and dizzy. He felt faint.

Carefully Jack led his brother near the open port-hole-type window and sat him in an antique-looking chair. Chip, still gasping for breath, began to speak.

"Oh, no!" Jack commanded. "Just shut up for a couple of minutes." He grinned. "I know how hard that is for you, but just sit there and rest and keep quiet."

Chip smiled weakly and nodded.

Jack removed his jacket and then took off his shirt.

"Why are you undressing?" Chip asked.

"Didn't I tell you to shut up?"



Jack used his own shirt to wipe Chip's hair and face. Then he used his jacket as a trainer does with a towel for a boxer in the ring. He waved his jacket as a fan in front of Chip, creating a current of air to cool him.

After a while Chip began to feel better. He held up one hand, palm out.

"Okay, I'm ready for the next round." He grinned. "I'll come out fighting."

Jack had to laugh.

"Brother, you are something!"

"I'm all right," Chip said. "Honest. I admit it was no picnic locked in that box like a living corpse, but you made it in time, and I'm all right now, Jack. Honest."

Jack shook his head in admiration.

"You're some kid. I've got to hand it to you."

"How'd you get in here?" Chip asked.

Jack pointed. "Through that window."

"You're some kid yourself," Chip said.

Jack shrugged, smiled, and while he was getting dressed again, Chip filled him in on all the events that had transpired, finishing off with, "Whoever it

was, I heard him come back for the station wagon."

Jack was dressed.

"Okay, let's get out of here."

"No," Chip said.

"What *now*?" Jack demanded.

Chip pointed toward the door in the rear.

"Those sounds I heard in there," he said. "I thought it was rats. But while I was locked in that darn coffin thing, I had time to think. Could it be that it's Auntie—Mrs. Brockton—locked up in there?"

Jack frowned. "Possible," he said.

Together they went to the door in the rear.

Jack pressed his ear against the door and listened.

"Faint sounds. I hear them," he said.

Chip put a finger to his lips.

"But maybe she's being guarded," he whispered.

"No, sir," Jack retorted loudly. "I made a lot of noise getting you out of that box. Any guard, and we'd have sure known about it by now."

"One hundred percent correct," affirmed Chip. "But that door's locked. I tried it. How do we go in for a look-see?"

"I have just the instrument." Jack laughed as he walked to the casket, then came back with the iron bar he had used to rescue Chip. "And by now, I'm also rather experienced. Give me room, Brother Chip."

The job at the door was far easier than the job at the cover of the black casket. It was a thin door with a poor lock, and within minutes the boys burst into a small, square room illuminated by a shaft of light streaming in from a little, high, barred window.

20 *The Vanishing Lady Reappears*

Mrs. Anita Brockton was seated in a chair at a table. That was all the small, square room contained: Mrs. Brockton; the chair; the table, with dishes and eating utensils on it; and a large, crumpled handkerchief on the floor near the chair. There were still particles of uneaten food on the dishes.

Auntie Brockton did not greet the boys for three reasons. First, she did not see them because she was blindfolded. Second, she could not speak because she was gagged. And third, she could not move because she was firmly tied to the chair.

While Chip sprang to her deliverance, Jack picked up the handkerchief from the floor. It had a strange odor. Jack folded the handkerchief and pocketed it.

By then, Chip had removed blindfold and gag. Mrs.

Brockton stared at them in silence.

Jack could see the terrible fright in her eyes.

"Please, Mrs. Brockton," he reassured her. "Whatever was done to you, we didn't do it. Matter of fact, we're going to get you out of here. And fast!"

Now the spunky little woman smiled.

"Thank you," she murmured, "but what did happen to me?"

"No time for that now," Jack replied, helping Chip untie her bonds.

Free of her bonds now, she stood up, stretched, and repeated, "What *did* happen to me?"

Jack took her arm.

"We'll talk about that later. It could be dangerous, for all of us, if we're found here. Let's go, Mrs. Brockton."

"But where am I?" she asked.

"It's some kind of warehouse," Chip told her.

Jack led her into the immense, damp, eerie room.

"My goodness," she said, "this is a most interesting place."

Jack sighed. "Our one interest," he declared, "is get-

ting out of this interesting place.”

“How’re we going to work it, Jack?” inquired Chip.

“Here, help me,” Jack said, pointing to a huge crate.

Between them, Jack and Chip pushed the crate until it was under the porthole-like window.

“I’ll go out first,” proposed Jack. “Then toss me the envelope. Then you’ll help Mrs. Brockton out. I’ll catch her. Then come through yourself. Okay?”

“Chip,” Mrs. Brockton inquired, “what’s in that envelope?”

“Your proofs.”

“Proofs?”

“Your pictures.”

“You boys think of everything.” She giggled ingratiatingly.

“Please, Mrs. Brockton,” Jack parried earnestly. “We’ve got to get out of here. You heard the way I outlined it?”

“Yes.”

“I hope,” Jack stammered, “I—hope you can manage it.”

“Oh, I can manage it, young man,” sang out the

peppy little woman. "We're having quite a lovely adventure, aren't we?"

Jack and Chip, despite all they had been through, burst into laughter.

"Auntie Brockton," Chip stated admiringly, "you're a wonderful lady."

"And you're a dear sweet boy, and very handsome. And so is your dear brother."

"Please, not now." Jack groaned. "Now let's get out of this crazy place. Ready, Chip?"

Chip clicked his heels and snapped off a salute.

"Ready, General."

Jack bounded up onto the crate, took a last look at the two standing on the concrete floor, then disappeared through the window.

Now Chip leaped up onto the crate and looked out the window.

There was Jack waiting in the street. Chip tossed down the envelope, then jumped off the crate.

"Here we go," he said to Auntie Brockton.

He helped the tiny lady up, then got up on the crate with her.

"Think you can make it?" he inquired.

"Of course I can make it," she answered.

"You're not afraid?"

"What is there to be afraid of?" she chided. "Just arrange my skirts after me, dear lad."

She scrambled through the window and was gone.

Down in the street, Jack caught her in his arms.

"Are you all right?" he asked breathlessly.

"Of course I'm all right," replied the little lady, adjusting her clothes. "But I'm worried about the youngster in there."

"Gosh, you're a doll," exclaimed Jack. "Don't you worry about Chip."

Chip came through feetfirst and landed lightly.

"Let's get away from here," Jack commanded.

Flanked by the Power boys, Auntie Brockton marched to the next corner and then halted.

"What's today?" asked Auntie.

Jack blinked. "Pardon?"

"What day is today? I've sort of lost count."

"It's Thursday," Jack imparted.

"I wish to go home," Auntie declared. "Instantly."

"I don't think so," Jack murmured.

"Don't be insolent, young man," Auntie said resolutely.

"Not insolent," advised Jack. "Practical."

"He's the practical one in this family," Chip murmured.

"Mrs. Brockton," Jack explained, "you may think you wandered into—whatever it is you think it was—because of one of your amnesia attacks. But we don't think so. We think you were abducted."

"Abducted!" Auntie giggled. "Don't be silly, young man. Who would want to abduct an old lady like me?"

"Do listen to Jack," Chip observed. "When it comes to downright common sense, always listen to Jack."

"I believe this is a police matter," Jack said gravely.

"Police!" Auntie Brockton drew herself up to her full height, which wasn't very high. "Why would the police be interested in an old lady who suffers from occasional amnesia?"

"Not amnesia," Jack intoned soberly.

"But how would *you* know that, my dear young man?" Auntie asked quite reasonably.

“Look, please,” rejoined Jack, “before you go home, before any of us do anything else, let’s talk it over with Detective Wilson.”

“Well, Detective Wilson,” Auntie chortled brightly. “Well, there’s a nice man. A very nice man indeed.”

Jack sighed in relief and hailed a passing taxi.

21

One at a Time

In Detective Wilson's office, they all tried to talk at once.

Detective Wilson held up his hands as though in self-defense.

"Please," he cried. "One at a time. Chip, you start."

"From where?" Chip asked.

"Start from last night," Jack said. "When you went to Mrs. Brockton's to pick up the proofs."

Chip told his story fully and fluently, and then Jack picked it up and carried it through all the way to Mrs. Brockton's rescue.

During the telling of the tale, Auntie Brockton's normally pleasant expression grew stormy. Her face became flushed and her blue eyes flashed wrathfully. Now she fully realized the seriousness of the situation.

"No question that I was abducted," she said, and after a pause added crisply, "But why? For what reason? And by whom?"

"Certainly not for ransom," replied Detective Wilson. "There was no ransom note, no demand for money. Nancy reported you as a Missing Person. She believed you had had another amnesia attack."

"So did I," allowed Mrs. Brockton. "Even when I found myself as I was—blindfolded, gagged, and tied—I felt I had had an amnesia attack and had wandered into some scrape."

Detective Wilson turned again to Chip.

"Do you remember the license number of the station wagon?"

"Of course," responded Chip.

He recited the license number and Detective Wilson jotted it on a sheet of paper. Then the detective pushed a button and a uniformed policeman entered. Detective Wilson handed him the sheet of paper.

"Please check that out for me, Barney."

"Yes, sir." Barney went out, but Detective Wilson buzzed for him to come back.

"One other thing, Barney. I also want the name and address of the owner of the Tripod Warehouse, located at one forty-four MacDougal Street."

"Yes, sir," said Barney, and quit the room.

"Now, then." Detective Wilson addressed himself to Mrs. Brockton. "Let's hear your side of this affair."

"Well," she said, "as Chip told you, he called me last night about the proofs."

"What time last night?"

"About eight-thirty," replied Mrs. Brockton. "I told him to come over. I was all alone in the house. Maud, of course, was gone for the day, and Nancy had gone to a play with Paul. I settled down with a magazine in a comfortable chair in the living room—and that's all I know." She smiled. "Later I was going to watch TV."

"That's *all* you know?" demanded Detective Wilson.

Mrs. Brockton shrugged helplessly. "That's all I know."

"Didn't anybody ring the bell?" inquired Detective Wilson. "Did you go out of the house? Did you see or hear anything unusual?"

"Nothing," confessed Auntie Brockton. "Perhaps I dozed off. Perhaps—it's possible—I fell asleep."

"Asleep!" Jack jumped excitedly. "No, you *didn't* fall asleep! I mean you *did* fall asleep!"

Detective Wilson observed Jack as if Jack had gone stark mad.

"Didn't? Did? What's the matter with you?" queried Wilson.

Jack had suddenly realized the meaning of the strange odor on the crumpled handkerchief.

"What I'm trying to say," he yelled, "is that Auntie Brockton didn't *fall* asleep! She was *put* to sleep!" He whipped the handkerchief out of his pocket and gave it to Detective Wilson. "Just smell it," Jack said. "I found it near the chair to which Auntie was tied."

Detective Wilson sniffed the handkerchief. His nostrils quivered and he made a face.

"Chloroform," he muttered.

"See what I mean?" cried Jack.

"I sure do," retorted Detective Wilson. He laid the handkerchief on a far corner of his desk. "That's the way it was, all right. Somebody sneaked in behind

you, Mrs. Brockton, and clapped that handkerchief, which was first soaked in chloroform, over your nose and mouth. In no time at all, you were unconscious."

Auntie Brockton shuddered.

Detective Wilson, seated behind his desk, leaned forward.

"Were your doors locked, Mrs. Brockton?"

"Yes, they were."

"Who has keys?" he snapped.

"Nancy, Maud, and myself."

"Who else?" he inquired tensely.

"No one."

"Think, Mrs. Brockton!" he commanded. "How could somebody have slipped into your house? Certainly Nancy didn't kidnap you, nor Maud."

Suddenly Mrs. Brockton was flustered. "Well," she stammered, "there is a way, but it's very unlikely."

"I'll decide that," countered Detective Wilson. "What way?"

"Well, you see, Detective Wilson, the downstairs door—the basement door—has a wide ledge over it. We always keep a key to that door hidden up there

on the ledge, just in case any one of us happened to lock herself out of the house. Many people do that, you know," she asserted. "I mean, keep a key hidden outside in case of getting locked out."

Detective Wilson nodded.

"And who knew about this key on the ledge?" he inquired sharply.

"Well, Nancy, Maud, and—well, our friends—people whom we trusted."

"Like Paul and Mr. Davenport and such kind of friends?"

"Well, yes," admitted Auntie Brockton.

Detective Wilson displayed his irritation by spreading his hands widely, as though he were going to embrace somebody.

"Friends can tell friends," he mourned, "and that could go on and on, and we'd never get to the end of it. I advise you, after you get home, to take that key away and don't ever leave it there again. If any of you get locked out of the house, call the police. We'll get you back in." He sat back in his chair. "No sense pursuing *that* line of investigation. All right, then,

Mrs. Brockton, please tell us what happened when you recovered consciousness."

"I found myself just as the boys found me."

"Blindfolded, gagged, and tied to the chair," murmured Wilson.

"Precisely, sir." Auntie nodded.

"Was the gag ever removed? Did you hear any voices, sounds?"

"No voices or sounds. And the gag was removed."

"For what purpose, Mrs. Brockton?"

"I was fed," she replied. "Somebody periodically removed the gag from my mouth and spooned food into me. There was soup—very good soup, as a matter of fact—and some kind of sandwiches, quite delicious."

"I'm not interested in the quality of the food they served you." Detective Wilson sighed. "All I'm interested in—did you get any hint, any idea, of who was feeding you?"

"No, sir. No hint, no idea whatever."

"Anything else, Mrs. Brockton?"

"Nothing, until these dear boys rescued me."

There was a knock on the door and Barney, the

uniformed policeman, entered and handed a long type-written report to Detective Wilson.

"It's all there, sir," Barney said.

"Thank you, Barney."

Jack, Chip, and Mrs. Brockton sat quietly while Detective Wilson silently read the report. Then Detective Wilson looked up from the paper and emitted a long, low whistle.

"Are you acquainted with a Mr. Fred Montgomery?" Detective Wilson inquired of Mrs. Anita Brockton.

"Never heard the name in my life," replied Auntie Brockton.

"Well, his name is all over this report," declared Detective Wilson. "Name, address, phone number, everything. Just listen to this: Fred Montgomery not only owns the red station wagon, but he also owns the Tripod Warehouse. He's in the antique business. He has his shop, where he does his business, on Broadway near Eighty-sixth Street. And he has his warehouse, where he stores his antiques, at one forty-four MacDougal Street. Now, if you please, does any of this ring a bell with any of you?"

Chip raised his hand.

"Chip," said Detective Wilson quietly.

"I get a little bell," said Chip.

"Let's hear it ring, lad." Detective Wilson smiled.

"Well, sir," offered Chip, "the first time we were in Mrs. Brockton's house—Dad and Jack and I—we talked about astrology with Miss Della Medford. She told us her studio was on Broadway and Eighty-sixth Street. Now you tell us that this man's antique shop is on Broadway near Eighty-sixth. That kind of rings a bell, although the ringing may not mean a thing."

"You've got an alert mind, young man," applauded Detective Wilson. "As a matter of fact, according to the address here, Montgomery's antique shop is right next door to Miss Medford's studio."

"So what?" asked Jack.

"So nothing," rejoined Detective Wilson. "It may be pure coincidence, or it may not. Let's find out."

Detective Wilson pointed to a box at a side of his desk.

"That's called a conference phone," Wilson informed them. "I speak into it and the person's voice

on the other end comes through it so you can all hear. Please bear with me." Wilson dialed a number. They could all hear, through the box on the desk, the rasping sound of the phone ringing on the other end. Then, clear and distinct, a female voice answered through the box.

"Montgomery Antique Shop," announced the voice.

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Montgomery," Wilson said into the box.

"I'm sorry. Mr. Montgomery is out of town."

"Are you his secretary?"

"No, sir. This is his answering service."

"This is Police Headquarters calling; Detective James Wilson. Whom am I speaking to, please?"

"I—I'm Mrs. Smith." The voice sounded scared.

"Don't be frightened, Mrs. Smith," soothed Wilson.

"You have other phones there, I assume?"

"Yes, of course, sir."

"While I hold on, have somebody check back with Police Headquarters. That way you'll know this call is legitimate."

"Yes, sir. Please hold the wire." In a few minutes

the voice sounded through the box again and now it was not scared; it was respectful. "Detective Wilson?"

"Yes, this is he."

"Mrs. Smith again. We've made our check. What is it you wish to know?"

"Well, first off—does Mr. Montgomery own a dark-red station wagon? Do you know?"

"Yes, sir, he does. A maroon station wagon."

"Did he take it with him out of town?"

"No, sir. He did not."

"Very good," said Detective Wilson. "Now, where out of town is he, and when did he leave?"

"He went out of town on Monday for a month's vacation to visit his daughter in San Francisco."

"Did he close his shop, Mrs. Smith?"

"Yes, but I've been instructed that any business emergencies are to be referred to his friend and neighbor, Miss Della Medford. In point of fact, Mr. Montgomery left instructions with Miss Medford to take care of certain deliveries of antiques that have to be made during the period of his vacation. He gave her the keys to his warehouse on MacDougal Street, and he

also gave her the keys to his station wagon. Now, if you wish Miss Medford's address and phone number. . . ."

"No, thank you, Mrs. Smith. You've been very helpful. Just one other thing."

"Yes, Detective Wilson?"

"This conversation must remain in strictest confidence. If any word of this leaks out I shall hold you responsible."

Mrs. Smith laughed weakly. "I won't breathe a word of it. I promise you. Golly, I wouldn't dare."

"Fine. Thank you again, Mrs. Smith. Good-bye."

Sitting back in his chair, Detective Wilson directed his gaze to Mrs. Brockton.

"Auntie?" he prompted.

Auntie Brockton was ashen.

"Impossible!" she exclaimed. "Della Medford? Impossible!"

Chip leaped to his feet.

"I agree with Auntie," he cried. "Absolutely! Not Della Medford!"

Calmly Detective Wilson inquired, "Why?"

"Because I *saw* the person carrying the rolled-up

blanket. It was not a woman. It was a man!"

"Just what did he look like?" asked Detective Wilson, hoping to stir Chip's memory.

"A tall man," Chip replied, "wearing a dark suit and a dark hat."

"Can't you give us a better description?"

"I wish I could," Chip said, "but I can't. It wasn't possible to see his face—just a blur under the dark hat. No moon out, or anything like that. It was a cloudy night, and I was too far away. By the time I got near enough, he was already in the station wagon and driving away."

"Yes, I understand," Detective Wilson remarked regretfully.

"But what now?" demanded Auntie Brockton. "My goodness, here I am—in Police Headquarters—and nothing happens! We just sit around and talk. Detective Wilson, I *insist* that we have some action. You represent the police—I insist that you find out, that you furnish me with some explanation. First there was the terrible business of Nancy's ring disappearing—and it's *still* gone—and now . . . and now . . . *I* disappeared. . . ."

And finally the poor little lady was crying.

She had no pocketbook, no handkerchief. She covered her face with her hands and wept.

Detective Wilson produced a batch of clean tissues from a drawer, went to Auntie, and stood over her, waiting.

When she looked up, he handed her the tissues.

She smiled at him gratefully and wiped her eyes.

"I'm sorry," she quavered. "Please forgive my outburst. Put it down to a bit of hysteria on the part of an old lady." She sighed. "I've had quite a trying time, you know."

"A trying time indeed," said Detective Wilson and sympathetically patted her shoulder.

23

Ready for Action

Now Detective Wilson was once again seated behind his desk. His eyes were narrowed in thought, and the fingers of one hand slowly stroked his chin. He watched Auntie Brockton, but did not speak until he believed her to be fully recovered.

“All right now, Mrs. Brockton?”

“Ready for action,” she proclaimed gallantly.

“I have a plan in mind,” stated Detective Wilson. “It requires a great deal of police investigation. I shall need—I would say—about twenty-four hours.”

“Anything we can do to help?” chirped Chip.

“You’ve done a fine job, you and Jack.” Detective Wilson smiled. “You certainly *have* helped. No, you boys can relax this time. But I do need help from Mrs. Brockton.”

"I'll do whatever you say," replied the white-haired lady.

Detective Wilson clasped his hands on the desk.

"Actually, I want you to do nothing," asserted Detective Wilson.

Auntie Brockton cocked her head and frowned, looking perplexed.

"What I mean," drawled Detective Wilson, "is that we leave it just as you thought it was—an amnesia attack."

Now it was Jack's turn to look perplexed.

"You mean we take her back to that warehouse and tie her up again?" Jack complained.

Wilson shook his head. "No."

"Just what *do* you mean?" queried Auntie uneasily.

"Let me state it as briefly as possible," explained Detective Wilson. "Last night you were waiting for Chip Power. Then somehow you drifted into an amnesia attack—because the next thing you knew, you found yourself tied up somewhere, blindfolded and gagged. Clear, so far?"

Auntie nodded.

"You kept working on your bonds," continued Detective Wilson, "until somehow you succeeded in getting yourself free. You removed the gag and blindfold. You found yourself locked in a little room. In desperation you hurled yourself against the thin door of that little room until the lock of the door broke. Then you saw you were in some kind of warehouse. There was no way out of the warehouse except through that porthole-window, locked by the latch on the iron disc. You moved the crate near and inspected. When you pulled open the iron disc, you saw that the round window had no bars. So you opened the window, slid through, and dropped into the street."

Auntie Brockton beamed proudly at the Power boys.

"Pretty slick of me, eh?" she said with a chuckle.

"Do you understand what I'm driving at?" inquired Wilson.

"Not quite," answered Auntie.

"All part of the story you'll tell," proceeded Detective Wilson. "In your dazed condition, you just wander about the streets. You have no money, no handbag, nothing. Finally you go to a policeman and ask

him to take you to Headquarters, to Detective Wilson."

Auntie Brockton clapped her hands.

"I *do* know what you're driving at," she exclaimed.

The detective grinned approvingly. "You tell Wilson a crazy story, all about being bound, gagged, blindfolded, and spoon-fed. Of course, Wilson doesn't believe a word of it. He knows you're subject to these amnesia attacks. He knows that when a person comes out of an attack like that, the mind can play all sorts of tricks on him. He lets you rave on; but finally, after permitting you to rest and seeing that you're in good condition, he drives you home."

"Oh, I *do* understand," cried Auntie. "In that manner you will have the full twenty-four hours for your investigation without a soul suspecting you're working on the case."

Detective Wilson smiled broadly.

"You are a bright and clever woman, Mrs. Brockton."

"Not bad," said Chip. "In fact, very good indeed. I like your plan, Detective Wilson."

Wilson chuckled. "Delighted to have your approval,



Mr. Chip." He looked about. "Any questions?"

"What happens tomorrow?" asked Jack.

"Tomorrow," replied Wilson, "I'll invite a lot of people to Mrs. Brockton's home and we'll see if we can't unravel this."

"I hope you're inviting us, too," suggested Chip.

"If *he* doesn't, *I* am," announced Auntie.

"Of course you boys are invited," said Wilson. "I'll call you on the phone tomorrow and tell you just when to be there." And now Detective Wilson stood up and bowed to Auntie Brockton. "Time to go home now, everybody."

"And about Nancy's ring?" mildly inquired Auntie Brockton.

"I'll clear that up for you, too. I promise." Wilson smiled, then added, "You'll remember your story, I hope, Mrs. Brockton."

"It's your story, but I'm stuck with it," said Auntie, laughing. "Oh, I'll remember it, Detective Wilson. Don't you worry your head about that. I'll do my part. You just concentrate on your investigation." She took his hand in both of hers. "Good luck, sir," she said

gravely. "I'm most anxious for you to get to the bottom of this."

Detective Wilson drove them home in an unmarked police car.

"I'll drop you boys off first," he said.

At Central Park West and Seventy-fifth Street the boys waved good-bye to Detective Wilson and Auntie Brockton.

They went up to their apartment, but no sooner were they inside the door when they realized something was wrong.

They stood shoulder to shoulder, motionless, then suddenly realized what it was that was wrong.

Blaze had not come to greet them.

Suddenly there was a sound from the darkroom.

"Gosh, what *now?*" breathed Chip.

Blaze came prancing out, followed by—Mr. Thomas Power!

"Dad!"

"What a surprise!"

Rushing forward, the boys virtually smothered their grinning father.

The family embraced happily, Blaze barking and leaping all over them; finally the boys released their dad and gave him a chance to speak.

"Finished up in Denver long before I thought," explained Mr. Power. "Thought I'd surprise you, but sure enough—nobody home. My sons were off gallivanting, eh?"

"Not gallivanting," observed Jack.

"So, while waiting for you," said Mr. Power, "I thought I'd look over Mrs. Brockton's photos." He lowered his eyebrows at Chip. "I found no photos, nor any proofs."

"Here are the proofs." Chip laughed, waving the envelope.

"You mean you just got them?" inquired Mr. Power.

"Well, yes, kind of roundabout," affirmed Chip.

"Something's going on here," growled Mr. Power. "Fill me in, boys."

And then the boys breathlessly filled in their father on the hectic events of the day.

On Friday, at five o'clock, the phone rang in the Power apartment and Mr. Power himself answered. It was Detective Wilson.

"Hi, James," said Mr. Power.

"Thomas! Last I heard, you were supposed to be in Denver."

"Came home before I expected I would," imparted Mr. Power. "But you didn't call to inquire about my business affairs, did you, James?" Mr. Power laughed. "As a matter of fact, because of you, I've been postponing business."

"Because of *me*?" Detective Wilson's voice sounded puzzled.

"I've developed Mrs. Brockton's photos and they're very beautiful," explained Mr. Power. "But I didn't

dare deliver them, what with all the boys have been telling me."

"They did themselves real proud, Thomas."

"Thank you," said Mr. Power. "They're great kids. Anyway, James, here we are—all of us—staying in the apartment all day waiting for your call. Is this it? I mean is this *the* call?"

"This is it, Thomas. As a matter of fact, I'm calling from the Brockton home. I've got quite a crowd here. Figured I'd call the boys last—no sense their waiting around till everybody else came."

"When do you want us to come over?" asked Mr. Power.

"Now," was Detective Wilson's one-word reply.

"James, would you give a message to Mrs. Brockton?"

"Sure."

"Tell her, please, that we're bringing her photos."

Fifteen minutes later the Power family arrived at the Brockton home. Mrs. Brockton herself opened the door for them.

Before the boys could even begin to defend themselves, they were seized and kissed by Auntie Brockton.

"What's up?" gasped Chip.

"I want to apologize," said Auntie. "I'm thoroughly ashamed of myself."

"For kissing us?" speculated Jack.

Mr. Power laughed, but Auntie Brockton replied quite earnestly.

"No," she said. "For the accusations against you concerning Nancy's diamond ring. Detective Wilson just finished telling us the truth about Nancy's ring." She waved her hand toward the living room. "There's a great crowd in there, and there's more Detective Wilson has to tell us, but he's been waiting for you."

Mr. Power put the envelope with the photos on the table in the vestibule. "Your photographs, Mrs. Brockton," he said. "They're very lovely, but I don't suppose, at this moment, you have time to look at them."

"True," she conceded. "You know I did want them for yesterday, as a gift to Nancy on her birthday, but we were somewhat occupied with other matters yesterday, weren't we, young men?"

"That we were." Chip smiled at Auntie Brockton.

"And now, if you please, Mr. Power and young gentlemen"—Auntie Brockton bowed graciously—"they await us in the living room."

The first thing that impressed Chip was the uniformed policemen.

"Look at all the cops," he whispered to Jack.

"Like one for each person," Jack replied. "Seven of them."

Chip grinned. The count was right. Aside from the Power family and Detective Wilson, there were seven people in the room. And stationed silently against the walls were seven sturdy policemen.

Chip's eyes slowly scanned the room. There was Nancy, blond and willowy, talking with Paul, tall and dark. And there was tall, silver-haired Dr. Torrance, in quiet conversation with tall, sedate Mr. Samuel Davenport. And there was tall, moon-faced Adam Quincy—all the men were so tall, thought Chip—chatting with dark, attractive Della Medford. Now Auntie Brockton ranged herself alongside Detective

Wilson, who raised his hands in the air.

"All right. Let's have a little quiet here."

A deep silence fell upon the room.

"You are all now acquainted with the facts," declared Detective Wilson, "concerning the disappearance and reappearance of Nancy's ring. You know about the fake ring in the jar of cold cream upstairs. You know why Nancy falsely accused the Power boys of stealing the real ring. But there are many things you do *not* know—and some that I don't know. But we're all going to find out about those things here and now." Wilson's stern gaze roved the room and stopped at Nancy. "Miss Brockton, if you please."

Nancy Brockton stepped forward.

"For instance," said Detective Wilson, "one of the things I do not know is why you needed ten thousand dollars two months ago. You pawned your ring for ten thousand dollars. My question, Miss Brockton, is—*what did you do with that money?*"

Rigid and pale, Nancy Brockton stood silent.

Detective Wilson looked to Paul. "Recently Nancy asked you to borrow ten thousand dollars so she could

get the ring out of pawn?" he queried.

"Yes," replied Paul. "I borrowed the money for her."

"Did she tell you why she had pawned the ring in the first place?"

"No, sir, she did not."

"Do you have any idea what she did with the original ten thousand dollars—the money she got for pawning her diamond ring?"

Paul shook his head. "No, sir, I have no idea."

Detective Wilson's gaze returned to Nancy.

"I must insist that you give us that information, Miss Brockton."

Nancy's lips trembled, but she made no reply.

Grim-faced, Detective Wilson paced up and down.

Then, facing his audience, he threw his bombshell.

"I wish to inform you, Miss Brockton—and all the rest of you present here—that Mrs. Anita Brockton did *not* have an amnesia attack Wednesday night. *She was kidnapped!*"

A gasp resounded in the room.

Nancy whirled about to her aunt.

"You—you were kidnapped, Auntie?"

Lips pale, mouth tight, Auntie Brockton nodded affirmatively.

"But *why?*" cried Nancy.

"We intend to find out, right here and now," thundered Detective Wilson. "We believe that the kidnapping is connected with your reason for pawning your ring. You got ten thousand dollars from the pawnbroker. Now you must tell us what you did with that money!"

There were tears in Nancy's eyes, but she remained silent.

"Is it that you do not want to involve someone else?" asked Detective Wilson. "Is it that you believe it a matter of honor to keep silent?"

Trembling, Nancy nodded.

"I tell you," declared Detective Wilson, "it is a matter of greater honor to divulge the facts. Your dear aunt was kidnapped, brutally tied up, gagged, and blindfolded." He pointed to the Power boys. "If not for those lads—their brains and their courage—she might still be held in that condition; she might even by now be dead as a result of her suffering."

Again there was a gasp in the room, and it was evident now that Nancy was wavering between telling and not telling.

Detective Wilson shot the final bolt to convince her.

"Unless you speak out, Miss Nancy, we may never be able to convict the culprit. Furthermore," Detective Wilson added, "yesterday you were twenty-one years old. As of noon yesterday, the inheritance is yours. No one, not even your aunt, can postpone it any longer. You have no excuse. There is no reason for fear." Detective Wilson paused for a long moment; then in deep, slow tones he said, "I beseech you, Miss Brockton—in all honor, as a representative of the law—I beseech you to speak out!"

Silence from Nancy.

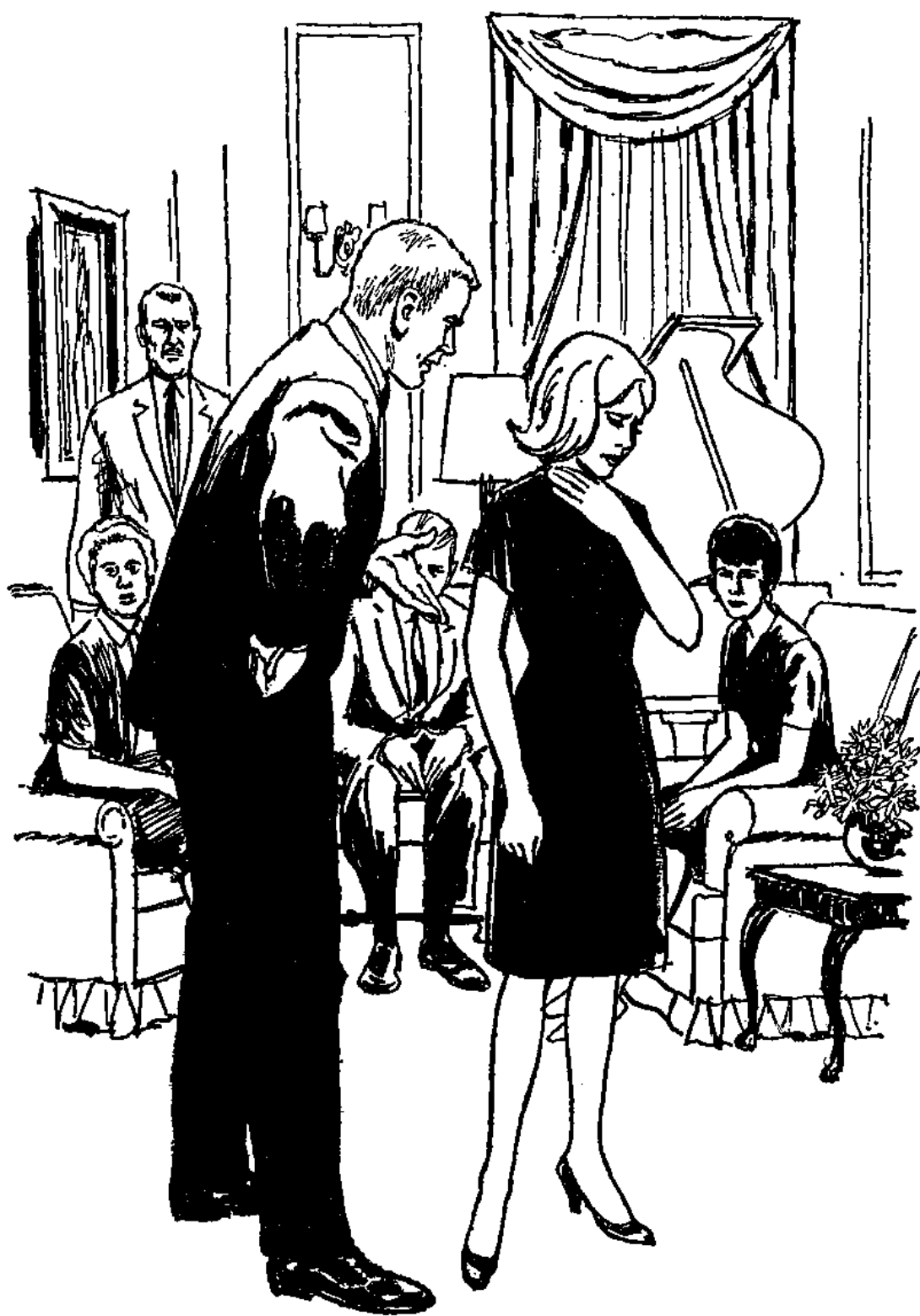
A great, thick silence filled the entire room.

Then Nancy's lips moved. Her arms straight down at her sides, her cheeks ashen, her mouth trembling, Nancy spoke.

"Dr. Simon Torrance," she said.

"I thought so," muttered Wilson.

"Dr. Torrance," Nancy stammered. "Some months



ago he talked to me about an invention, a wonderful thing. A hearing aid so tiny it could slip into an ear without showing. No wires, no batteries, just tiny transistors; this invention would not embarrass people who are deaf. It would not show. It could be slipped into an ear, making it possible for deaf people to hear. It was a wonderful invention, but it could be stolen from Dr. Torrance unless he could construct a model which he could patent in Washington. That would take money, a great deal of money. Dr. Torrance needed an investor, somebody with money, and he discussed this with me."

"And you offered to help?" prompted Detective Wilson.

"It was not only help," answered Nancy. "It would be a good investment. In time, a great deal of money would come back to Dr. Torrance and myself."

"How much money did he want from you?" asked Wilson.

"One hundred and ten thousand dollars."

"*How much?*" shouted Detective Wilson.

Quite simply, Nancy replied, "One hundred and

ten thousand dollars. He needed ten thousand dollars right away, for legal fees to his lawyers. There would be time for the balance, the additional hundred thousand. But it had to be a secret! Nobody must know—not a soul—else others might learn about his invention and steal it. I promised secrecy.”

“And also promised the additional hundred thousand,” said Wilson sarcastically.

“But first, the initial ten thousand. I pawned my ring for that purpose. You know exactly what I did, Detective Wilson.”

“But you promised secrecy,” repeated Wilson. “Nobody would know—not your aunt—nobody!”

“Yes, Dr. Torrance wanted it that way, and I could not blame him. Please understand, this was a marvelous invention that could help humanity. Certainly Dr. Torrance would be entitled to the full credit, and he was fearful that, just by possible idle gossip, others would learn of it, and it could be stolen away. I pledged full secrecy.”

“And the balance?” demanded Wilson. “When would you deliver the balance—the hundred thousand

dollars—to Simon Torrance?”

“When I came into my inheritance,” answered Nancy. “Do please remember, Detective Wilson, I was not dealing with a stranger. I was dealing with Simon Torrance—a doctor, a psychiatrist, an inventor.”

Detective James Wilson smiled grimly.

“My dear, innocent, good-hearted young lady,” he growled, “it is my duty to inform you in his very presence—and I challenge him to deny it!—that your alleged friend, this benefactor of humanity, your handsome Dr. Simon Torrance, is not an inventor, not a psychiatrist, not any kind of doctor. He is—to state it baldly and bluntly—*nothing more than an arrogant swindler!*”

The room rustled with excitement as Dr. Simon Torrance, tall, slender, and silver-haired, haughtily pointed an imperious finger at Detective James Wilson.

"I warn you, Mr. Detective," stormed Simon Torrance. "Unless you withdraw that slanderous statement, I shall have you stripped of your badge and shall hound you for damages in every court of this land."

Coolly Detective Wilson replied, "I intend to prove every word of that statement. Now you just hold your tongue. I'm still in charge of these proceedings."

Detective Wilson motioned to two policemen.

Quickly those policemen positioned themselves on either side of Simon Torrance.

And now Detective Wilson addressed himself to the others in the room.

"In the matter of the kidnapping of Mrs. Anita Brockton," he declared, "we had one definite clue, a dark-red station wagon." Rapidly now, he told of the events of Auntie's abduction and rescue, giving full credit to Chip and Jack Power. "And so, after we checked the license plate, we knew that Mr. Fred Montgomery had given the keys to his warehouse and the keys to his station wagon to—Della Medford."

Della Medford gasped, as though plunged into icy water.

Excitement quivered through the room.

"So yesterday," continued Wilson, "when Della Medford came here to comfort Nancy on her aunt's disappearance, she came in the station wagon that was available to her. But young Mr. Chip came here, also—to pick up the proofs—and he noticed that station wagon. I've already told you how he climbed in to find out what this was all about." Grim and serious, Detective Wilson paced while talking. "Thus, Della Medford was connected to the kidnapping, but young Chip stated *definitely* that the person who had carried Auntie out in the rolled-up blanket was a man!"

"You bet," interjected Chip.

"So I had to continue my investigation," the grim-faced detective went on. "I remembered that Auntie had told me that Miss Medford came from New Orleans."

"Yes, I did," cried Auntie. "I told you that on Wednesday, when Dr. Torrance and I went to Della's for her Creole dinner."

"I wired an inquiry to the New Orleans police, and I got this report." Detective Wilson took a type-written sheet from his pocket. "Della Medford and Simon Torrance are husband and wife."

"No!" breathed Nancy.

"Yes," said Wilson. "And they are also a pair of sharp swindlers, twice arrested—once in Boston and once in Paris. Della, as an astrologer, seeks out and finds rich clients. This time, by chance, Auntie Brockton fell her way."

"But nobody tried to swindle *me*," declared Auntie.

"They realized you were too clever," answered Wilson, "but first they set up their act. For your amnesia, Della recommended Dr. Simon Torrance, but he was

not a doctor at all. He set up his phony office only for you, and you were his only patient. That way they became close friends of yours, and they chose the heiress—young Nancy—as the easy mark instead of you, Auntie Brockton.”

Poor Nancy was weeping now.

Paul, putting an arm around her, quietly consoled her.

“Young Miss Nancy,” continued Detective Wilson, “had great faith in the astute Dr. Torrance. She admired and respected him and fully believed the cock-and-bull story about his great invention. Actually, he had her pawn her ring because he needed the ten thousand dollars to eat and drink and live and pay his rent until he could complete his swindle. He swore Nancy to secrecy because he knew if she told any of this to Paul or Auntie or Paul’s father, they would investigate and unmask him.”

Samuel Davenport spoke up.

“But then,” he mused aloud, “came that evening when Adam Quincy was here.”

Wilson nodded. “Auntie wanted Mr. Quincy to

appraise the ring, but it was the fake ring. Poor Nancy, quite frantic, did what she did in order to cover up. And so the Power boys were caught in the middle and stood accused of the crime."

Now it was Lawyer Davenport who was pacing.

His forehead furrowed in thought, he inquired, "But what was the purpose of the kidnapping? Why, in heaven's name, was Mrs. Brockton abducted?"

"Quite simple," responded Wilson. "I had found out about the pawned ring, and Nancy had admitted all the facts. True, Nancy?"

"Yes," said Nancy.

"But you told us—the Power boys and myself—to keep the facts secret until after Thursday, at which time the inheritance was definitely yours and could not be postponed."

"Yes." Nancy nodded. "And you and the boys made that promise to me."

"Now—and this is most important, Nancy—did you inform Dr. Torrance what I and the Power boys knew?"

"Yes, I did," revealed Nancy. "When Dr. Torrance

brought Auntie home on Wednesday from Della's Creole dinner, I told him."

"Now do you understand, sir?" Wilson asked Samuel Davenport.

"Not quite," replied the lawyer.

Wilson summed it up. "Torrance became worried that perhaps I, or the Power boys, might divulge the full truth about the pawned ring to Auntie Brockton. In such case, there was still time for Auntie to postpone Nancy's inheritance, and Auntie just might do that. Dr. Torrance was not taking any chances—"

"I get it!" interrupted Paul. "Thursday was the last day that Mrs. Brockton could file an affidavit with the surrogate, the last day that Mrs. Brockton could postpone Nancy's inheritance. So Torrance kidnapped her to keep her out of the way until after Thursday."

"Precisely, young man." Now Wilson turned to Auntie Brockton. "Did Torrance know about that key over the ledge of the basement door?"

"Of course. Please remember, I considered him a dear friend."

"So Wednesday night," explained Wilson, "Tor-

rance sneaked in through the basement. He knew that Nancy had gone to a play with Paul and that Mrs. Brockton was alone in the house. Carrying the handkerchief soaked in chloroform, he found Mrs. Brockton reading a magazine in the living room, stole up behind her—and you know the rest.”

“Yes, yes.” Hands clasped behind his back and still pacing, Lawyer Davenport completed the case. “They knew that she was the ‘vanishing lady’ and that she suffered amnesia attacks. After Thursday they would release her. She would tell some crazy story which nobody would believe. In time, perhaps, she herself wouldn’t believe it. But these swindlers would have accomplished their purpose!”

Simon Torrance stood tall and haughty. His face showed neither fear nor remorse.

Della Medford, on the other hand, was visibly shaken. She was pale as a sheet, her lips were dry, her eyes were enormous in a glare of fright. Suddenly she shuddered, sagged, and fell to the floor in a faint.

Torrance attempted to rush to her, but was held back by the policemen.

Mr. Power and Detective Wilson raised her from the floor and carried her to a couch, where they revived her.

Della Medford sat up smiling a dreadful smile.

"We tried," she confessed, "and we were caught. In a few days it would have been all over. We would have had the girl's money, and we'd have been out of the country."

"Out of the country?" asked Wilson. "Where?"

"We have passports and plane tickets to Brazil." Della Medford rose to her feet, shrugging helplessly. "I just want you to know we meant no harm to Auntie Brockton. Our purpose was exactly what you said—to keep her out of the way until after Thursday." She drew herself up dramatically. "We shall tell our story—the truth—and throw ourselves on the mercy of the court." And then she began to laugh hysterically. "To think—" she cried, pointing toward Chip and Jack, "to think that Simon Torrance and Della Medford were defeated by—*by a couple of boys!*"

Detective Wilson motioned to the policemen.

"Get these criminals out of here," he said tersely.

“Take them down to Headquarters and book them. I shall join you within a short time.”

Crestfallen and silent, Simon Torrance and Della Medford, surrounded by policemen, were led out of the room, embarking on the first lap of their journey to punishment and prison.

Excited conversation dominated the Brockton living room. In pairs and in groups, some loudly, some quietly, they talked.

Auntie Brockton congratulated Detective Wilson.

“Wonderful,” she said. “I thank you for such a wonderful piece of police work.”

“I would love to take all the credit,” parried Detective Wilson, “but in all honesty, I cannot. There—” he indicated the Power boys—“there is where the credit belongs. If it weren’t for those bright young lads, there would be no congratulations, no credit for anybody.”

“So true, so wonderfully true,” Auntie agreed and went to the boys.

Now Adam Quincy buttonholed Detective Wilson.

"In my own way, I solved this case for you," chortled Quincy.

"So?" inquired Wilson, eyebrows arching.

"If I hadn't been here at the party Monday night, if Mrs. Brockton hadn't asked me to appraise that ring, a swindle would have been quietly pulled off without anyone being the wiser."

"Fate plays funny tricks," Detective Wilson said, smiling enigmatically, "but always comes up with the same answer—crime doesn't pay. Eh, Quincy?"

"I can vouch for that, Mr. Wilson."

Paul, who had been huddled in a corner with Nancy, suddenly broke away and dashed up the stairs.

"What's with him?" inquired Samuel Davenport, watching his son disappear. "What goes on, Nancy?"

Nancy had no time to reply before Paul came rushing back. He was carrying the jar of cold cream. Laughing, he opened it, took out the fake ring, and slipped it on Nancy's finger.

"As of right now," he announced, "we are formally engaged to be married." He hugged Nancy tightly, and Nancy giggled.

Auntie Brockton kissed the young couple, and Samuel Davenport shook their hands.

Chip, Jack, and Mr. Power had a short consultation. Then Chip flew out of the room and returned with Auntie Brockton's photos.

He proudly displayed them to Nancy.

"Your aunt wanted these for your birthday," Chip declared, "but now they'll be an engagement present—a combination gift from Auntie Brockton and the Power family."

It was Nancy—looking at Chip and Jack—who started the applause, and then Auntie joined and then all the grown-ups took it up, including Mr. Power and Detective Wilson. Within the admiring ring of applauding adults, the boys were too embarrassed to say a word. They just stood there and grinned happily.

THE POWER BOYS

The Mystery of
THE HAUNTED SKYSCRAPER

The Mystery of
THE FLYING SKELETON

The Mystery of
THE BURNING OCEAN

The Mystery of
THE MILLION-DOLLAR PENNY

The Mystery of
THE DOUBLE KIDNAPPING

The Mystery of
THE VANISHING LADY

2





1526

Whitman